

RAILWAY LIBRARY.— TWO SHILLINGS.

SIR VICTOR'S CHOICE

BY
ANNIE THOMAS



LONDON: GEORGE ROUTLEDGE & SONS.

SIR VICTOR'S CHOICE.

BY

ANNIE THOMAS,

AUTHOR OF "THEO LEIGH," "CROSS OF HONOUR," "DENNIS DONNE,"
ETC.

LONDON:
GEORGE ROUTLEDGE AND SONS,
BROADWAY, LUDGATE.
NEW YORK: 416, BROOME STREET.
1867.

CONTENTS.

CHAPTER	PAGE
I. MADGE'S OATH	1
II. DISPOSES OF A PLEBEIAN BRIDE	13
III. WHICH IS IT TO BE?	18
IV. MADGE'S PROPOSITION	25
V. PRETTY ALICE LISLE	30
VI. PICKLE LAGS BEHIND	34
VII. MRS. LISLE SPEAKS AS A PARENT	40
VIII. A TRAITOR IN THE CAMP	47
IX. DRUMMOND CLEEVE ON HIS RESPONSIBILI- TIES.	55
X. THE BROKEN TOY	64
XI. ALICE LISLE SHOWS "GREAT GOOD SENSE" .	73
XII. MORE OF MADGE'S ADVICE	83
XIII. MRS. SELWYN JAMES DEVELOPES A TALENT FOR WHICH HER HUSBAND "HAD NOT GIVEN HER CREDIT"	93

CHAPTER	PAGE
XIV. A DIFFICULT GAME TO PLAY	99
XV. FALSE MOVES	107
XVI. A COUNTRY KETTLEDRUM	116
XVII. CHARLIE AND ALICE BOTH ASSERT THEM- SELVES	126
XVIII. THE FORGOTTEN LETTER	135
XIX. AT ALDERSHOTT	140
XX. FRIENDSHIP IS AN EMPTY SOUND	154
XXI. MISS MICHEL AT HOME	164
XXII. THE DRIVE THROUGH THE SNOW AND ITS RESULTS	174
XXIII. MR. BLACKMAN CANNOT CONSENT TO GOLD HEALING THE HURT THAT HONOUR FEELS	183
XXIV. OFFER OF MARRIAGE	192
XXV. BAFFLED	201
XXVI. WHEN MADGE WAS TOLD	211
XXVII. LADY CLEEVE'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN PUBLIC	220
XXVIII. A BAD COMPANION	231
XXIX. OUT ON THE TERRACE IN THE SUN	241
XXX. A WOUNDED LION	251
XXXI. THE GATE-HOUSE FAIRIES	261
XXXII. A TIME OF PEACE	271
XXXIII. STRIVINGS AFTER A SENSATION	281
XXXIV. A MESSENGER OF EVIL	289
XXXV. "THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE LIVING NOW!"	298

CONTENTS.

V

CHAPTER	PAGE
XXXVI. THE RIVALS	308
XXXVII. MAN AND DOG	318
XXXVIII. DOOMED TO DESTRUCTION	329
XXXIX. MADGE'S REPENTANCE COMES TOO LATE .	342
XL. A BRAND PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING.	352
XLI. A TELEGRAM	359
XLII. THE CROWD ROUND THE HOUSE IN OLD DEURY	368
XLIII. INCURABLE	372
XLIV. IN WHICH SOME ARE MARRIED—SOME ARE DEAD	376
XLV. A STROKE OF GENIUS	386
XLVI. STEP GENTLY	401

SIR VICTOR'S CHOICE.

CHAPTER I.

MADGE'S OATH.

THAT breakfast room in the house in Sloane Street, in which my story opens, did not look an appetizing place, even though it was looked at by the light of the broad bright July sunbeams that came streaming in through the stiffly starched muslin curtains. Those beams threw a halo over the teapot—gilded the unpleasantly moist butter with a richer hue than its composer had succeeded in giving, and caused the sleepy, fat-faced maid servant to sneeze with violence as she completed the organization of the breakfast table, by giving a vindictive jerk to a refractory cup that wouldn't stand symmetrically in the middle of its saucer.

"Bless their laziness!" the domestic muttered; "it must be ten o'clock, for the post 'ev been in an hour."

As she spoke a young lady of about one-and-twenty came into the room.

"Make haste and make the tea, Mary," she said, walking at once to the window and throwing it open; "Miss Charlie will be down directly. Any letters for me?"

"No, Miss," the sleepy-faced, horny-handed Phyllis replied. "Only one for your pa. Ain't missus coming down to breakfast?"

"I don't know," Miss Cleeve said. "Miss Charlie and I are going out. If mamma comes down before we go, all right; if not, tell her we thought she wouldn't mind our not waiting for her, as we had to go and match some wools."

The servant nodded a stupid, sulky assent to the order, and went out to make the tea. Miss Cleeve looked round as she vanished, and a slight flush was on the young lady's face. "*She'd* be impertinent if she only knew how to be," she muttered angrily, and as she spoke she sighed, and then bent her head forward wearily, and rested it on the hand which still held the window sash.

The attitude—the bent head and uplifted arm—showed her finger off to rare advantage. She was a tall girl, with a flat back and well-rounded shoulders, and a small waist. She looked a fine girl in the streets, and a showy one in evening dress; for her head was well set on to her throat, and was covered with light brown hair, which she wore in a coronet; and her face was attractive from the purity and clearness of her dark skin and the vivacity of her flashing grey eyes. At present she was dressed in a silver-grey alpaca that looked too good for her surroundings, for the furniture of the room was poor and shabby, and even the table-linen was soiled and crumpled.

Mary had not returned with the teapot when the door opened with precipitation, and another girl, three or four years younger, came into the room. She was similarly attired, which only served to heighten the contrast between her sister and herself. Miss Charlotte (familiarily "Charlie") Cleeve was very fair. Fair in every sense of the word—a lovely young creature, with deep dreamy blue eyes, dark brown lashes and brows, and wavy masses of golden hair, which she plaited up so tightly every night that it caused her head to appear of the circumference of a bushel in the daytime. A lovely young creature, with opaque white skin and a delicate wild rose on either cheek, and lips of a hue a shade or two darker. Hers was not the beauty of fire and animation, but it was the English beauty of delicate colouring—a beauty of an order to strike, and it had struck many, and many had told her that it had done so.

Miss Charlie walked up to the rather defective glass that stretched from the mantle-piece up to the ceiling, planted her hands one on either side of her waist and pirouetted round, in order to get a back view of herself.

"Looks crooked," she exclaimed. "Do just turn round, Madge, and tell me if it is, or if it's only the glass. I can't see a bit in that room of mine."

Miss Cleeve turned her head over her shoulder and laughed. The teapot coming in again at the moment, she went to the head of the table and prepared the milk and sugar for the reception of such fluids as Mary had ordained they should have; then she answered—

"Of course it's crooked, Charlie; you will have your dresses so tight."

"Ah! you say that," the younger sister rejoined carelessly, "because, unluckily for my peace of mind, my waist happens to be ever so many inches smaller than yours. Who's that letter for?"

"Papa."

"It's a black-edged envelope," Miss Charlie observed, seating herself at the table, and glancing at the epistle which lay on the opposite side. "I wonder who's dead, and who it's from."

"I have long ceased to speculate about letters," Miss Cleeve said. "They never bring us good news, and it's no use speculating about the bad before it is distinctly told to us, and we can't avoid it."

"But this isn't a dun, for it's black-edged," pursued Charlie.

"You know how papa detests your using those slang terms, Charlie."

"And you know how I detest your pleasing habit of hauling me up, and severely reprimanding me on all occasions, Miss Cleeve," the younger sister rejoined instantly, the warm blood mounting to her brow as she spoke. "And I don't see why my amiable prejudices are not to be attended to as well as papa's. Such nonsense," she went on angrily. "I'm not to call them 'duns,' when I hear papa swearing at them every day of my life. It's the same about everything. I'm brought up like a pauper, and expected to behave like a princess."

"It isn't worse for you than it is for me or papa," Margaret Cleeve replied in a low tone. "You're so

unjust directly you are irritated, Charlie; it's not unnatural that papa should wish us to behave like gentlewomen, though he cannot give us all his daughters ought to have."

"There's one luxury he's given us that was quite superfluous," Charlie said, laughing: her wrath was evanescent, and she was good tempered again now. "A step-mother is a blessing I could have dispensed with easily enough. I didn't mean to blame papa, Madge; at least not to blame him unkindly; but I am sick of the folly of always making believe to be people of position, when we haven't any worth mentioning: it *is* humbug, for of course if we had, we shouldn't come and stick ourselves down in flyblown lodgings, opposite to the Sloane-street pump."

"Your vulgarizing yourself will not be a likely way to improve your position."

"My dear Madge, I may indulge innocuously in a style that would be detrimental to you. Captain Vernon said only yesterday, that I was a fast fairy, and that I was just the style, so *petite* and delicate-looking, that might be a little fast with impunity. You require to tone yourself down; nature has stamped refinement on me."

"And you're doing all you can to obliterate the stamp," Miss Cleeve said, rising. "Come along, Charlie, and let us put our hats on. If Captain Vernon has called you a 'fast fairy' admiringly, I know you will behave as such, whatever I say."

"After all, there is no more harm in my using slang words that papa doesn't like, than in your taking a walk that he 'detests' your taking, Madge: he'd be more savage at our walking in the Park just at the time Forster and Vernon said they'd be there, than at my speaking of the duns."

Miss Cleeve here lowered her sun-shade (they had come out into the street now) abruptly, and made no reply for a minute or two; then she said—

"*Don't* call men by their surnames, Charlie; it grates upon me dreadfully. As to disobeying papa, or rather

walking where we know he wouldn't like us to walk, I am not sure that we are not justified in doing it in this case; it's our duty to relieve papa of the burden of our maintenance, and the only way in which we can do it, is to—

"Catch these men if they'll be caught by us," the younger sister interrupted with defiant hardihood. "Bah! Madge, your refinement is only skin deep after all, I'm beginning to think. You won't call them by their surnames, and you always perfidiously protest against their joining us; but you *know* you are running after Major Forster, you know you are. Such humbug! such pretence!" Miss Charlie was irritated again palpably.

"I thought so last night," she went on presently; "when after having begged, and bothered, and bored Mrs. Levinge into sending us an opera ticket, papa pretended to those men that he wouldn't permit them to come down with us, because it would be so 'marked an attention.' Such bosh! when they'd been in the box all the time, and must have known that it wasn't paternal prudence, but only stupid pride that didn't like to be seen driving away in a common street-cab."

"Really, Charlie, you're horribly undutiful: papa's prejudices might meet with more tender treatment at your hands, I think."

"I'm not, in reality, one bit more undutiful than you are; only you're fonder of playing at being a fine lady than I am. I'd take to the part readily enough, if I had the 'properties;' but I don't see the fun of sitting in a little poky room all day long, and every day, simply because it doesn't accord with pa's views that his daughters should go out walking without a footman at their heels, and he hasn't—and never will have—the footman to send after them. I prefer perambulating like a plebeian, and so do you in your heart, or you wouldn't be here now."

"Papa never has objected to our taking an early morning walk in the Park, Charlie."

"You palter with the truth, Madge; you know he'd go out of his mind if he knew that we, Drummond

Cleeve's daughters, came out here to meet 'men in the Line.' Law! how pa's contempt for his betters amuses me!"

As she spoke they came abreast of the Knightsbridge Barracks, and between themselves and that building an infantry company was exercising on the greensward. Two men in plain clothes who had been watching the evolutions of the battalion, came across to them presently, and even before they spoke, the two sisters were conscious of there being a something different in the bearing of the two men whom their father had not permitted to escort them to the cab last night.

They were good looking, tall, fair, well-set up men, both of them, with the bearing of good breeding and the voice of incapacity. A couple of characteristics that are strongly marked specialities of our sons of Mars in time of peace. There was nothing very remarkable about either of them mentally, but such as they were they seemed to have won the hearts that were worthy of something better—if only something better had been thrown in their way.

The Misses Cleeve had been playing this dangerous game of meeting men with whom they were but slightly acquainted, without the knowledge of their father, for some months now. They told themselves and each other, that they were driven to this course, which they felt to be despicable, by the despicable life they led at home. And by their extremely natural desire to escape from that life into the new and better one which matrimony alone they thought could bring them. Like the majority of the unprovided-for daughters of poor English gentlemen, these girls had no standpoint—nothing upon which to rely. Their parents had done little for them beyond bringing them into the world, and with their future so totally the affair of Providence, they could not feel grateful for the boon of their birth. The traditions of gentle blood surrounded them, and the gentle blood that flowed in their veins betrayed itself still in their manner and appearance, though they had gone through poverty and privations enough to vulgarize the embodi-

ment of the condensed refinements of centuries. To the normal poverty and privation these poor girls had known all their lives, there had been for the last year or two a wearing element of peevishness added to their troubles. For Mr. Cleeve had perpetrated the folly of marrying a wife not much older than Madge, his eldest daughter, because he was heir presumptive to a baronetcy, and his pride yearned for a son.

Better a virago on your otherwise happy, peaceful hearth, who will tear your temper and her own caps to shreds occasionally, and have it over, than a peevish martyr, who tyrannizes in a weakly fractious way, who magnifies trifles, sees a slight where none is intended, and is consistent in nothing save making those around her uncomfortable. No wonder they loathed their home, these girls, who were endowed, to their woe, with understandings and spirit, when this woman was placed in their midst. She loved her husband, and was afraid of him, and in awkwardly endeavouring to please, she made herself an odious trial to him, and failed, and saw that she failed, and then wept, and querulously complained about it to his daughters. She was one of those unpleasant women who never will be what other people are at the moment. Mr. Cleeve was subject to fits of chronic hilarity. Whenever he had succeeded in raising a little ready money, or in baffling his creditors, or throwing some peevish bailiff off the scent, for instance, he was as joyous as an elderly partridge who has escaped the terrors of another first and fifty Mantons might be supposed to be. And whenever he was joyous his second wife elected to be depressed.

She "wondered he *could*," she would remark, when he knew that they soon would be as badly off as ever; not that she ever complained (bridling and quivering with resignation and feeble spite); but it was hard that she never could do what other women did, and go where other women went, and have what other women had. And so on *ad lib.*, till for Drummond Claire Cleeve, Esq., heir-presumptive to an ancient baronetcy and large estates, was reduced to a proper and befitting state of despair,

which mood he usually strove to alleviate by being extra litigious with his daughters.

These girls never complained. He did not exactly delude himself into imagining their lot a blissful or enviable one, but he was far from understanding how nearly unbearable it was. Freely as they discussed their home troubles to each other, and freely as Miss Charlie censured what she termed papa's absurd pretentiousness, they were dutiful children in this at least, that they strove always to make the best of things before him. They never added to the burden life upon nothing a-year must have been to the man who had lived *en grand Seigneur* in his youth, by complaining or looking discontented. They took the pleasures he doled out to them thankfully, and they availed themselves of many that he would not have approved of, that were still harmless enough.

One or two of Madge's old schoolfellows lived in town; one was married to a lawyer, a vulgar man, truly, but good-natured and rich, of the name of Peyton. And the Peyntons indulged the Misses Cleeve with many piquant pleasures of a mediocre order, that would have caused their papa to wail with woe, and deem they had lost caste, had he but known of their proceedings. The Peyntons would take them to theatres, to the pit at the Opera, to oyster-suppers in the Strand, to Mrs. German Reed's Entertainment, and to other horrid places of the like sort. With Mrs. Peyton they would waltz up and down the Ladies' Mile and the Row in the height of the season, and get stared at insolently—for they were both of a striking order of beauty, and were with a woman whom no one knew—by men whom their father would never have permitted them to be acquainted with: not on account of any laxity of morals, but because they were of no position, and had no social standing. All these things the Misses Cleeve would do, and though they were harmless proceedings when analyzed, they were not *right*. The liberty of the subject in the case of the young English lady is respected sufficiently by conventionality; it is never well when she takes

more than strict conventionality is willing to allow her.

It is no morbid fear of there being marauders behind every social bush, thieves and despoilers in every thicket, which makes us proud to be seen perpetually on guard over our daughters. We mark our appreciation of their merit thus, as we do of our plate and diamonds by locking it up or sending it to our banker, and of our blood-horses by the ceaseless watch we cause a brace of "trusty grooms" (one to be a check on the other) to keep over them. So, on the whole, though poor Mr. Cleeve had fallen upon such evil days that the existence his daughters would have led under his rigorous *régime* would of necessity have been a monotonously tedious one, he can hardly be blamed for desiring that they should lead it rather than vary it ever so harmlessly by an occasional indulgence in pleasures that were *not* the pleasures of his order.

They walked for some time along in that nurse-and-perambulator besprinkled park, happily enough forgetful—through that delightful quality of youth of living in the present—of the meagrely-appointed home, and the miserably peevish mistress of it. These two soldier officers talked what sounded to their inexperience like very fashionable jargon indeed; besides, they had been for some time apparently devoted to the Misses Cleeve; and this morning—there was a difference—they were evidently more devoted still. Major Forster was an older, graver man, less liable to be carried away by his feelings than his friend; but Madge had hopes of affairs coming to a climax even with him soon. And of Captain Vernon there was no doubt: the sight of Charlie, in her new graceful dress and pretty white hat, was palpably too much for him. Miss Cleeve was not surprised to hear, when once more alone with her sister, on their way home, that "Vernon had proposed."

Charlie was rather subdued—more so, on the whole, than her sister imagined she would have been under the influence of the elation consequent on her first offer.

"I hope papa will like him," she said, softly, as they

knocked at the door. "I hope papa will *come* to like him in time, for I am very fond of him."

And then they went in, and heard great news.

Mr. Cleeve had come down to breakfast about an hour and a half after his daughters had left the house; and when his devilled kidneys and the portion of Strasbourg paté, left from his yesterday's matinal meal, had made their appearance, he bethought himself of inquiring why the young ladies did not make theirs?

"Please they're gone out this two hours," Mary told him, sulkily; for these late and irregular arrangements were subversive altogether of her ideas of decency and order.

"Since these Cleeves 'ad come as lodgers, her houtings was wus than ever," she told the authorized administrator of aforesaid decency and order, whose special mission in life it was to beat the purlieus of Elizabeth Street, Sloane Street, &c.

Mr. Cleeve was a good-looking (he had been handsome in youth), spare, delicate-handed man of fifty. His had been the fair, satin-textured, opaque-skinned beauty of his younger daughter Charlie; and the skin had but few creases upon it, though time had taken his toll in the wrinkles under the eyes. But he was still a good-looking and remarkably gentleman-like man—a refined Tartar, to whom the females of his family always would koo-too, because he had eloquent grey eyes, and long silken black lashes to the same.

It upset his equanimity considerably to find that neither Madge nor Charlie were by to pour out the decoction of hedge-row twigs and broomsticks yeleft "tea" for him this morning. They had small, white hands, and a graceful way of using the same, both these girls, and their presence at his breakfast-table made it seem more like what *his* breakfast-table should be than did Mary's, who flopped his tea out, as it were, and then handed it to him in an awkwardly aggressive way, that was offensive to his taste—and his taste, poor fellow, was all that was left to him from by-gone, better days. Therefore it impaired his appetite to have his daughters absent themselves in this way.

He pushed away his devilled kidney untasted, and while he was regarding the Strasbourg paté with a lax interest, he asked if there had been any letters this morning. It was given to him at once, that unimportant-looking black-edged epistle, and he opened it with no undue haste.

But as he read it, his eyes kindled with the light of a triumphant excitement, and then his face faded! faded! under the pallid influence of some terrible despair. For the letter announced what the two young officers had seen in the columns of that morning's *Times*, viz., that Sir Arthur Cleeve, the baronet, his uncle, to whom Drummond was heir, was dead. And it also announced that Sir Arthur's son, by a marriage which had been kept secret for twenty years, would succeed his father in the titles and estates.

The blow was too hard for the man who had lived all his grown-up life on the anticipation of this glory, that was now so cruelly reft from him. "The Lord has forgotten to be good," he said; and then he burst into tears, and when they were dried, Drummond Claire Cleeve had aged terribly.

He had no heart to take his frustrated hopes, and warm and soothe them in the conjugal bosom. He sat there, an old, sorrow-stricken man, till his daughters came in, the one with the bloom of her partially realized love freshly, brightly upon her, and Madge happy in her sister's happiness, and reasonably expectant of a similar one ere long being her own. He recognised nothing of this—what father does, till it is thrust before him?—he saw nothing—he knew nothing—he thought of nothing but the frightful blank he had drawn. He remained stolidly quiescent long enough for them to mark his utter misery, and be agonized by it. And then he roused himself, and gave them the letter to read, and poured forth his plaint at fate. And they listened with startled ears to his pourtrayal of all the weary weight of woe the existence of this detested cousin would entail upon them.

"There'll be peace for a year or two, papa, for this letter says that you are appointed this boy's guardian,"

Charlie said at last; "he's only nineteen," she added, consolingly. Two years seem interminable at seventeen; the prophesied peace seemed of long duration to Charlie.

"And before the two years are over, papa," Madge said, fondly kissing her father, "you shall have security for the rest of your life being unharassed. Give me your hand, Charlie? Here, papa, listen! We'll pledge ourselves to this, that the expiration of the two years shall see one of us Sir Victor Cleeve's wife!"

Drummond Cleeve looked up suddenly. The beauty of his daughters had never occurred to him in all its fulness till this moment, when they stood before him, the one taking the other by the hand, mutely agreeing to this strange oath. Miss Cleeve's dark face was glowing, and her eyes flashing brightly; *she* "looked too old to be that boy's bride." He turned his eyes on his other child. Charlie's was waxen-hued at the possibility of a rupture of that morning's hasty betrothal and her full underlip was quivering painfully. Drummond Cleeve glanced from one to the other, in doubt for a minute or two, then he said—

"You children don't know what you are promising. You may not like him when he comes, and he may not like you. Don't mislead me with any more false hopes. Oh, I'm a miserable man!—old and—broken—a beggar!"

It *was* hard to bear, this sight of the head of the family whimpering and lamenting like an old woman. They had borne much, these girls, in the unacknowledged hope of the better day that was to dawn for them when their father's uncle died. They had borne poverty, privation, cark and care; and now their father's uncle was dead, and Sir Victor, his son, instead of Drummond, their father reigned in his stead, a thousand feelings urged them on to amend matters at any cost, if possible.

"Papa," Madge said, with a calmer voice than she had hitherto spoken in, "Don't repine—don't give way. At the expiration of your two years of guardianship either Charlie or myself will be Sir Victor's wife—so help me, God!"

CHAPTER II.

DISPOSES OF A PLEBEIAN BRIDE.

SIR ARTHUR CLEEVE had died in Paris, whither he had winged his feeble old flight a few months previously. He had thought that the bright French capital would put fresh vitality into his worn-out frame. He deemed that the limp hold he had of life was solely due to the relaxing influence of the soft Devonshire climate. So he had left his old mansion, "The Chase," and gone off accompanied by his son—only to die after all amongst strangers.

The boy had known but little of his father—nothing, in fact save what these few months in Paris had taught him. He had faint memories of having worn little velvet doublets and white frills long ago: and of having careered about a large house in company with a large dog, and of occasionally sharing with that dog the notice of a gentleman whom he was told was his papa. But this state of things could only have endured for a short time, for his next memories were of himself, still a mere mite, at a solemnly unpleasant school, minus velvet doublet, frills, dog, and indeed most things that made life agreeable; and the gentleman never appeared unto him there to accord him notice of any sort.

He remained at that school till he was about fourteen, spending his holidays at a farmhouse in the north of Devon, in the cheerful society of an old school west-country farmer, whom he was taught to call uncle, and that worthy's sister. The latter was a gentle, apple-cheeked woman, with soft rounded ways, and limbs, and features; a kindly dame, who was spoken of at times by her brother as one who "had known much sorrow." Sorrow, however, had not taught her to be sour or morose, or even melancholy. Hers was a quiet, tender nature, and she bore whatever burden fate had lain upon her with a smiling, rosy cheek and unruffled brow. They

always called her Mrs. Simpson in the village in which that farmhouse was situated. For she kept her secret well, and none but her brother knew that she was the wife of the proudest, richest baronet in the county, Sir Arthur Cleeve.

He had married her on impulse. The beauty of the low-born girl had attracted his eyes when he was on a fishing excursion, and he had immediately resolved that she should be his own on some terms or other. She was very simple, very ignorant, very much in love with him. But she was virtuous, this fair daughter of a race of clodhoppers; and before he could induce her to go away with him he had to promise her marriage. This was a light thing, for he had not the remotest intention of performing his promise! What struck the proud *roué* as particularly hard was that even when once fairly away with him, compromised already as she was, the girl refused to remain with him unless he at once made her his wife.

Sir Arthur Cleeve knew himself well enough to feel sure that time would weaken his passion for his toy; therefore he raged furiously at being required to bind himself to her for ever. But he could not give her up, and so it resulted in her beauty carrying the day, and his marrying her.

There was no guile and no subtlety about Lady Cleeve. She had no ambition—no pride—no plans. She was a simple-minded girl, anxious only to marry the man she loved for the sake of *being* his wife; she was careless about being known as such. She thought herself the most honoured of women in that he had descended so far from his high estate as to cast his magnificent eyes upon her at all. She sat at his feet, humbly offering him loving worship; and soon she palled upon him! The satisfaction of being “his wife” was hers. The knowledge that she was loathed by him was shortly hers also.

They were a gloriously handsome race, these Cleeves of The Chase, and Sir Arthur was well accustomed to see his beauty reflected in the loving eyes of lovely wo-

men. He had no fancy for depriving himself of this pleasure, so he had sedulously kept his marriage secret during the whole of the season which followed that moment of madness in which he had made this plebeian beauty his wife. The end of the season saw him openly attached to the reigning belle, and secretly to another man's wife. The end of the season saw the humbly-born Lady Cleeve a mother, broken-hearted and outraged by her husband's cruel confession of his infidelity to, and weariness of her.

She had, as I have said, neither ambition nor pride. She still loved this man who had grown to have such an insulting distaste for her—loved him too well to desire to remain with him and be wounded by his exhibition of it. To force him to acknowledge her as Lady Cleeve never occurred to her; and if it had, she would have rejected the idea at once, for it was his love she sighed for, not his title. Her heart was wrung by hearing his sleeping lips murmur another woman's name in tones of passionate endearment. She bent her head low in meek uncomplaining misery, when he told her that he could never introduce her into society, and that for her son's sake—for the sake of the future baronet—it would be well the world should never know how low her origin, and how unfitted she was altogether to be the mother of a Cleeve of The Chase. His faithlessness, his cruel indifference, and her love for her son, caused her finally to accede, almost willingly, to his request that they should part in peace. He was sick of her—sick to death of her, and he showed that he was so. To live with him would have been one degree more miserable than to leave him. So, when she knew that her child's future interests were assured—when she was well convinced that her self-abnegation would never mar little Victor's fortunes, she went back to her brother's house, told him her story, and essayed to forget her brief experience of better things in the incessant duties of the mistress of a farmhouse.

She had kept little Victor with her till he was four years old; and all that time his father had refrained

from expressing the slightest desire to see him. But when Victor was four years old, a messenger arrived from The Chase to take him back there for a visit. It was during this visit that he had worn the velvet doublet and white frills, and shared his papa's notice with a big St. Bernard dog.

Then came the school epoch and the holiday episodes at the farmhouse. At fourteen he left the school, and then came four years under the rigorous *regime* of a tutor; and at the expiration of those four years his mother died, and a hasty summons arrived from his father, to join him at The Chase, and accompany that estimable gentlemen, who had grown weary of all his mistresses, to Paris, where Sir Arthur died, as we have seen, and the hitherto unimportant boy became Sir Victor Cleeve, Baronet.

Sir Arthur Cleeve had appointed his nephew, Drummond, sole guardian to his son. He was no stranger to the dangerous fabric Drummond had erected on the hopes that would be blasted. He had always intended to inform Drummond Cleeve of his marriage, and of the existence of his son, should his wife die before him. But he deferred doing so, partly out of indolence, and partly out of a desire to escape being the one to give such bad tidings to a man whom he rather liked than otherwise. So it came to pass that he died without having done this simple act of justice, and the blow, all the heavier from being so totally unexpected, crushed nearly all the manhood out of the unfortunate Mr. Cleeve.

Sir Arthur had sought to modify the immediate effects of the evil his unjustifiable reticence had partially caused, by directing that his son's guardian should make The Chase his home during the term of his guardianship. They only waited, therefore, for the corpse and the young chief mourner to be safely landed in England, and then started off at once for the home that they felt should have been their own.

It stood on a good elevation, this house to which they came fraught with plans for burying its former, and

marrying its present lord. And as they caught the first glimpse of the grand old cradle of their race, the hearts of the father and his eldest daughter warred hotly against the fate which had wrested it from them.

The land rolled away down from it on every side but the north; there it rose to a height far above that of the house, and was thickly studded with fine old trees, through which the keenest blasts but rarely made themselves felt. But to the south-east and west the land sloped away, leaving The Chase in bold relief against the dark hill-side.

They had taken root in the land, those Cleeves, when Norman architecture was a genuine thing—the work of Norman hands. The house was grand, grey, feudal! Not of such vast proportions that a king and the flower of his army might have camped in it with ease—as of old the Sybarite Edward did in the halls of the noble Warwick—but still of a size that was impressive and of proportions that were fair. There were arched entrances to the hall in the centre and the towers at either end; the staunch old gate was standing still, the same one that had many a time and oft been closed against a ruthless enemy, but the portcullis was gone. The moat was there also, but the drawbridge was an idle thing now, for the waters were dried up, and ingress to the place was gained by a light standing bridge of gracefully fashioned iron.

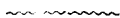
But though the time was past when martial precautions were necessary, and the means of taking them so thoroughly honourable, it was clear to the most casual observer that the owner of such a place must have a high standing in the land, and be of no small account in his own county. The two girls, who looked upon The Chase for the first time, were not insensible to the additional honour and glory which would have been theirs had they come there as the daughters of the lord of the soil, instead of merely tolerated guests. And Drummond Cleeve, who had abstained from visiting it for years, in hopes that when he should do so finally he should be its master, bent his head almost to his knees

and whimpered in abject woe that such should not be the case. "I shall go from it to a debtors' prison!" he sobbed; "and"——

"Trust me, you shall *not*, papa!" his eldest daughter replied, as the carriage rattled over the light iron bridge, and drew up at the main entrance.

The young baronet and the corpse of the late one were to arrive the same evening, so that there was little time for the Cleeves to do aught but get up looks and garbs of woe before Sir Victor was amongst them. They were all, with the exception of Mrs. Cleeve, thoroughly well bred; therefore they did not make themselves offensive even to such spoilt and arrogant domestics as had accumulated at The Chase during Sir Arthur's lax rule.

Miss Madge being a genuine Cleeve, and now at last in the cradle of her race, for the first time contested the management of the family-team with her step-mother. But she did it quietly, in a way that was becoming a gentlewoman. She ordained that a good comfortable suite of rooms should be prepared for the use of her father and his wife. She selected three smaller and equally comfortable ones for her sister and herself. But she decreed—and admitted of no appeal against this decree—that the principal apartments, the state-rooms, should be held sacred, to be at the absolute disposal of the boy-baronet, whom she was resolved upon conquering in some way or other.



CHAPTER III.

WHICH IS IT TO BE ?

MR. CLEEVE was a thorough gentleman. If he had been necessitated to cut his enemy's throat, he would have done it with a clean knife. Therefore, though his mind was distraught with anguish at there being any occasion to do it at all, he was resolved upon welcoming his young cousin properly. Like all well-bred men, he

never made people uncomfortable when it occurred to him to do the reverse. And this day being one of the salient points of his life, it did occur to him to do the reverse; so he did it well.

The heavy old-fashioned family coach had been sent up to the station to meet the young baronet, and convey him to the home of which he was now nominally master. Miss Cleeve's ears were the first to catch the sound of its returning wheels.

"He is coming, papa dear!" she said, gently going up and laying her hand on her father's arm; "meet him kindly."

And then Mr. Cleeve went out into the hall to meet his young ward, and his daughters grouped themselves in the doorway to watch that meeting.

The broad iron-strengthened door was thrown wide open, as the old family coach drew up, and from his seat on the box beside the coachman the young owner of the place descended, with what looked like a boyish bound of gladness at being there. He had scouted the idea of being shut up in the interior of the carriage, and had won the coachman's heart by the delight he expressed at being permitted to tool the horses home, which feat he performed with enormous courage and utter want of skill. Evidently he had not realized yet what a great man he had become, or he would not have shown the affluence of gratitude he did at his servant's concession.

He came forward quickly, removing his cap as he came, in salute to Mr. Cleeve, and by the light of the rays of the setting August sun he was clearly revealed to the two girls, who were standing there anxiously observant of him.

"What a boy he is!" Charlie whispered hurriedly to her sister, who answered the remark by a quick cautionary gesture and a reproving hush! alone.

He was a thorough boy still this young Sir Victor; you could see that at the first glance. He had not been matured at a public school, nor had he gained that easy, self-assured manner which the society of men and women of the world alone imparts to youth. His adolescence

had been passed in almost solitary companionship with his tutor—a worthy savan and a hideous bore. To all intents and purposes he came to them a thorough boy. And Madge rejoiced at the sight of such unsophisticated youth, for she felt that it would the more easily be moulded to her will.

It was a fair sight to look upon—this youth of Sir Victor Cleeve. He had all the good looks of his race, if he had not its graceful bearing yet. He was tall and well grown, with a lithe, pliant figure that would be magnificent when developed. His hair was bright brown, with a tinge at the tips that looked richly ruddy in the dying sunbeams. And his long deep-blue eyes glanced frankly out from between darkly fringed lids with a steady firmness that redeemed his face from the boyish indecision it would otherwise have worn. A broad brow—a nose that just escaped being aquiline, and yet was not straight—and a full handsomely-carved mouth, above which a young moustache was faintly dawning—these were the features that went to the completion of that *tout ensemble* which I declared above was a fair sight to look upon.

Mr. Cleeve called Sir Victor his “dear boy,” and expressed much delight at having succeeded in getting all his family down to The Chase to receive the owner of it. Then he wound up with an assurance of what a sad blow Sir Arthur’s death had been to him—Drummond Cleeve.

“I’m sure I’m very much obliged to you for your kindness,” Sir Victor answered heartily, casting shy glances as he spoke towards the ladies in the background; “but I didn’t know that you knew enough of my father to be cut up! You see I hardly knew him myself.” Then—he was a thorough boy still—he held his hand out again and said—

“I hope we shall get on well, sir?”

“I feel sure that we shall—all of us as well as you and papa,” Miss Cleeve interrupted, coming forward at this juncture. And Sir Victor’s young soul was flooded with entirely new sensations as this beautiful woman

extended her hand to him with a graceful kindness that he had never been the object of before.

"We won't have a formal introduction even from papa," she said, turning round to her sister, and still retaining the young baronet's hand in her gentle clasp. "This is your youngest cousin, Charlie Cleeve, and I am your eldest cousin, Madge Cleeve. You have no sisters and we have no brothers; so, Victor, we must be those things to each other while we live together. Do you agree?"

She was a very beautiful woman to be pleading for a favour from this boy who had never had soft tones and words addressed to him before, save by his poor, affectionate, commonplace mother. He felt bewildered and boyish and dazzled and delighted for a few moments, and then he responded to her request by bending his handsome young head and kissing her on the lips, like the guileless boy he was.

But when he would have given the same fraternal salute to Charlie, that young lady threw her golden head back, and would have none of it. For though the parental fiat had gone forth, and Captain Vernon had been unhesitatingly rejected by Mr. Cleeve, Charlie could not bury the ashes of the sole romance that had gladdened her young life just yet, poor child! Vernon, though he might have refrained from making the offer, had he known that the statement he had seen that morning, of Drummond Claire Cleeve succeeding to the title and estates of his uncle was erroneous, was still "nobly ready," she called it, to hold to his promise when the truth was told to him. But Mr. Cleeve put his pretensions down with a strong hand, and bore his daughter off into Devonshire, to nurse her memories of the soldier, if she liked, and beguile the young baronet into matrimony with her, if she could. And Charlie was not ready to attempt this last thing yet, for her heart was resentfully sore. Therefore, when Sir Victor was about to kiss her, she reared her head, and nerved herself for the refusal with the thought of the one chaste salute Captain Vernon had imprinted on her lips during their last stolen interview.

"Why won't you let me kiss you?" Victor said simply, "Your sister did, and she's ever so much older."

Madge's heart, as he spoke, echoed the words Charlie had uttered relative to him at first sight—"What a boy he is!" She did not desire him to become deeply impressed with her seniority. The idea darted through her mind that he might be too unsophisticated to be perfectly pleasant. But she was far too good an actress to betray her feelings. She slipped her hand into his arm, taking possession of him in a pretty feminine way that was very seductive, and walked him along into the room where Mrs. Cleeve—who had subsided into nothing since they had come to the place where the name of Cleeve was power—was sitting, and she introduced him to that lady, and made him at home in a few minutes. At home, and happier than he had ever been in his life.

"By Jove!" he burst out in the evening, with a joyous overflow of spirits that would not be controlled any longer, though he did strive to remember that his father's corpse was in the house; "By Jove! this is something like."

"Something like? I beg your pardon—*what?*" Mr. Cleeve asked. The boyish ebullition was in an unknown tongue to him; he had not graduated in Young England's loose school of phraseology.

"Something like being jolly," Sir Victor explained. "I wasn't very sweet on the plan of living at the Chase till I'm one-and-twenty, till I saw you, and—and—the girls, you know. If you'd been like my tutor—*whew-w-w!*"

He didn't say what would have happened if Mr. Cleeve had unfortunately resembled that gentleman. But his prolonged whistle sounded like a shrill benediction on the fate which had ordained otherwise. His whistle grated harshly through his guardian's frame, and caused every fibre in his body to tingle with annoyance at being compelled to listen to such sounds. In his heart he cursed his young relative for being an unpolished, underbred young bear, destitute of all refinement and desperately addicted to slang. It was a sore wound to the

pride of Drummond Cleeve that he should be brought to such a pass as to regard a union between one of his daughters and an uncultured boy as a great boon and a desirable thing. He thought of what he had been himself at nineteen, and then he glanced at Sir Victor, who was lolling on a couch.

"The mother came across and marred the breed with a vengeance there," he muttered to himself. "Good Gawd! to have been ousted from such a place as this by such a boy as that!"

Women are quicker to discern promise for the future than men. True, Charlie compared Sir Victor with her soldier lover—her captain with the long drooping moustache, and habit of looking as if he were in reality a handsome man. And comparing Sir Victor with Vernon, she found the former—despite his rare personal beauty—wanting. But Madge had a keener judgment and a more critical taste, and she recognised that in this young cousin of hers which would shed fresh lustre on his race when he shook off the remnants of his boyishness, and took unto himself the full mental trappings of a man.

"This stage won't last long," she sagely reflected, as she looked at his impassioned young face; "he will fall in love with one of us, and that will age him fast enough; it is the lack of all experience of that sort which has kept him the boy he is."

The only one who slept soundly that night was the pivot on whom so many hopes turned—the boy-baronet, Sir Victor Cleeve. He was delighted with the turn his fortunes had taken. To be master of The Chase, and to have the prospect of two years' constant companionship with Madge and Charlie.

"How pretty they both are!" he thought dreamily; but the old one's the jolliest by ever so much. I'll marry one of them."

When Miss Charlie had plaited up her hair tightly to its own eventual destruction, in order to secure to it for the morrow the wave that was dear to her heart, she went into her sister's room for the few minutes' chat that habit had made essential.

"Oh! ain't I glad I'm out of Sloane Street," she said, throwing her hands up and clasping them above her head. "We never can go back to anything of that sort again, Madge."

"It will be our own fault if we do," Miss Cleeve replied. That young lady was as fully alive as her sister to the change for the better, but she rather dreaded Charlie's exuberant satisfaction betraying itself to others. Don't let any of the servants hear you enlarging on the present bliss and the past penury, Charlie. Papa wouldn't have any one down here, where the name is so honoured, know what he's gone through for the world."

"If the name's so honoured, one of the possessors of it acknowledging to poverty couldn't hurt it.

"No, perhaps not; but still, we may as well hold our tongues about it. No traces of it are left on us, thank goodness. And as I said before, we need never go back to it—it will be our own fault if we do."

Charlie sighed, and thought of her captain. She rather over-rated the amount of elegance and comfort with which a captain's pay could surround her, and the thought of being the married belle of a garrison was pleasing to her feelings.

"It was you who promised papa, Madge. I couldn't say anything of course at the moment, but papa must have understood afterwards, when Vernon told him how *very* fond we are of each other, that I had no intention of binding myself to marry Sir Victor if you can't."

Madge Cleeve laughed.

"My dear Charlie," she said, "your affection for Vernon will last just one week and no longer. As for the other, it is not for us to decide which it is to be who is to fulfil my vow to papa—to which you agreed, be pleased to remember. I'm quite ready to be Lady Cleeve, if Victor is not blinded to my merits by your superior charms. And if he is, I'm equally ready to see you Lady Cleeve. But one of us it must be. You'll see the necessity for it as strongly as I do before you've been in this place and enjoyed the comforts which are our birth-right a month.

And on that they separated. But neither girl slept soundly that night; the great question of which it was to be agitated them too much.

CHAPTER IV

MADGE'S PROPOSITION.

SIR ARTHUR CLEEVE was deposited in the mausoleum of his race with all the sombre splendour that was due to the honour of the house of which he had been the head. The name of the ostriches who had been mulcted of their feathers for the creation of those colossal plumes which nodded above the hearse was legion. And the tails and manes of the mourning horses were the longest and thickest the arrangers of those horses had ever sewed on to them.

The start was a fine sight, for half the county was there in closed carriages, following in the wake of the principal vehicle of woe which conveyed the son of the deceased and that son's guardian, to witness the sad ceremony. The ladies of the family watched the procession with much emotion through a chink in the drawing-room shutters. And one of them panted eagerly for the day to come when a brighter cavalcade should go forth along the same route to the marriage of the boy who would henceforth take his place in the county as one of its magnates.

There was a great assemblage at The Chase after the funeral, and a grand refection, and many hearty wishes were expressed for the future welfare of the young Sir Victor. He came to his cousins in the drawing-room when the guests had departed, looking flushed and excited, and repeated to them some of the countless kind things that had been said to him by brother baronets, and other country gentlemen with high-sounding names. Madge listened to his proud recital of how graciously he had been welcomed into his own order with sympathetic eyes. But for all that, she was thinking rather anxiously

of the danger that might accrue to her plans should these men's daughters be gifted with that fair light-complexioned beauty she had heard of as a specialty of the Devonshire women. None of these feelings, however, appeared in her face. No mute check was offered to Victor's vaunts of the fuss they had made about him.

People called at The Chase in a few days. The neighbourhood delighted in gaining admission into the fine old place again that respectability had tabooed so long,—delighted in the youth and good looks of its new owner, and in the graceful girls whose importance was at once recognised, in that they were Cleeves, and the daughters of Sir Victor's guardian.

And amongst the earliest to call, were the rector of the parish, Mr. Lisle, his wife and daughter.

"Isn't she pretty?" Victor asked admiringly of his cousin Madge, as they stood out on the terrace whither they had accompanied their guests on their departure.

"Yes, very," Madge answered heartily. Miss Lisle's beauty had struck her with painful force as soon as she saw it, but she had no intention of increasing its importance in Sir Victor's eyes by essaying to undervalue it. In course of time she would delicately indicate in what Miss Lisle was wanting—to widely open Sir Victor's eyes to the young lady's lack of *ton* at once, would be probably the way to make him in love with her simplicity. And the dutiful daughter knew that it behoved her to permit Sir Victor to fall in love with none but herself or her sister.

She was two years older than this cousin of hers. And two years' seniority when the woman is twenty-one, makes the man appear very young indeed. She felt very mature by his side, but the consciousness of that maturity did not oppress her yet, for her heart was untouched by the handsome boy whom still she was resolving to marry.

Standing here on the terrace by his side, her eyes saw nothing but his lands and his troops of red deer. He was the owner of these things to her, as yet—and nothing more.

"Do you girls ride?" he said to her after a few

minutes' pause; "that Miss Lisle was talking to me about her pony; she says it's impossible to drive much about here, you get at the prettiest places through such awful narrow, heavy lanes."

"We have no horses here," Miss Cleeve replied; the truth was, they had no habits, but she desired to conceal their lack of anything that they might be supposed to have from Sir Victor.

"I shall give you each a horse," he said, magnificently. "I have never had anything but a beast of a pony myself yet, but I mean to go in for good horses, now—and a plenty of them. I s'pose you ride?"

"Yes," she said; "but it's Charlie's *forte* more than mine. Charlie is particularly fond of it, consequently she does it well."

"And she shall have a good horse—a regular pacer—to do it well upon," Victor Cleeve said, in his boyishly grand, magnificent manner. "Charlie shall have the best horse I can get her—though we don't get on so well, do we, as you and I, Madge?"

"You'll get on very well in time," she replied, half scornfully. She was thinking how more than probable it was that the younger, fresher beauty of her sister would "in time," ~~was~~, undesignedly, what she was ready to peril much to gain—Sir Victor's heart, and the offer of his hand.

Drummond Cleeve maintained a smooth unruffled front with difficulty during the immediately ensuing weeks. His young ward was disposed to spend his money lavishly. This the conscientious guardian would not have objected to by any manner of means, had he himself been differently circumstanced. As it was, he felt outraged while the stud was being organized; the money that should have been his own was thrown away so glibly by this thoughtless boy.

"And I am at the end of my resources," he said peevishly to his eldest daughter; "and my lawyer won't advance another sou."

"Couldn't you give Sir Victor to understand that you didn't sacrifice your town habits, and come and bury

yourself and family here at The Chase, for nothing, papa? He knows nothing of that abode of bliss in Sloane Street; London to him, thanks to his father's teaching, means for a Cleeve, a palace looking into a park. We needn't undeceive him, and then he will feel that an equivalent income for metropolitan delights forsworn for awhile for *his* good, is no great thing to anticipate at his hands."

Mr. Cleeve put up his solitary remaining sign of having once been a highsouled, independent-minded gentleman. He blushed.

"Could—couldn't you—would it be better to make—I mean, Madge, wouldn't it be as well that you should hint this to your cousin? You've a good deal of tact, my child; a great deal of tact—you got that from me—your poor mother had none, none at all; but I've always recognized your full possession of the quality. You're a true Cleeve, with plenty of fine tact. I think you'd better make the suggestion to your cousin."

The colour had faded from his face while he was speaking. He only looked pitifully weak and anxious in the eyes of his daughter as he concluded.

"On a point of business do you think it well I should interfere, papa? Dear! that is not like *you*."

She remembered every point of the doctrine he had been wont to inculcate. He had always held verbally, that a woman lost somewhat of her sweetness, her most feminine characteristics, when she once stepped over the threshold of privacy. "I have no desire," she had heard him say, when she was a very little child, "that my daughters should be either clever or accomplished. If they do any one thing wonderfully well, they'll be wanting, perhaps, to show that one thing off in a semi-public manner. A gentlewoman must never be mentioned." These had been his paternal sentiments when life was not such a hard struggle with him; and now it rather shocked her, and weakened her faith in his innate refinement, to find that he was ready to waive these sentiments—impose an odious task upon her—and meanly subject her to that from which he shrank himself. There was a

sorrowful plaint in the girl's voice as she said, "Dear! that is not like *you*."

Mr. Drummond Cleeve fidgeted under his child's steady mournful gaze.

"If you think it a wrong thing to propose to him, why, in God's name, did you propose it to me?" he answered, pettishly. "You're just like your poor mother, just! She was always irritating me by proposing bold measures, and then carrying them out in a half-and-half way that did me a great deal of injury. I have no one to take counsel with, no one to consult, no one to sympathize with me, and I never had, or things would have been different—very different."

Madge Cleeve was not a girl to shed tears when she was reproached. Her gorge rose at a reprimand, but she bore it from her father with a composure that should have assuaged such a well-bred gentleman.

"Don't say that, papa. My counsel may not be worth listening to, but it's always at your service; and as to sympathy, you know how freely and warmly I'd give you that if 'twould only serve, and not hurt you more."

She went up to him as he sat in his easy chair, and knelt down, clasping her hands over his shoulders, and bending her face down upon them.

"There," he said, turning his head round and kissing her; "get up, get up, my dear. I'm too harassed and unhappy to respond to effusive passages just now. Greater obedience and a smaller show of affection would be more gratifying—but that women never will learn."

"I'll ask Victor myself, papa—and I'll do it to-day; anything rather than that you should think me lacking in aught towards you."

What mixed motives were swaying the girl as she spoke? She was attached to her father; she did desire to see him rebound from the stultification his pecuniary difficulties always plunged him into when they pressed; and she knew that relief, however temporary, would cause this rebound. But also she was conscious that should Sir Victor be beguiled into giving his guardian an income, the habits might be theirs without application be-

ing made to their cousin for the cash to procure them. "And we must have them," she thought, "for he must not ride through these lanes alone with pretty Alice Lisle."

CHAPTER V.

PRETTY ALICE LISLE.

MISS LISLE went home from that call at The Chase with her pretty head in a whirl. The village of Baysford was small, and the society thereof limited. But the neighbourhood surrounding Baysford was good, i. e., society was wanting in neither quality nor quantity. And into this society Miss Alice Lisle, for reasons hereafter to be shown, had failed in penetrating with what she would have deemed desirable frequency.

Her father was the cadet of a good house in a distant county, and had the fates ordained that he was to remain in his own land, his daughter would have been "one of the Lisles," and at a premium. But, unfortunately, there was no living in his own country in the gift of his college. Therefore he had been compelled to tear himself away from the shadow of the family tree, and come to Baysford when it was offered to him. And in that Devonshire neighbourhood his clerical was the sole position he had, and his daughter was only "pretty Alice Lisle."

Miss Lisle of Baysford had at two widely-distant periods of her existence made raids upon the grand cousins in the far-off county. She was taken to Lisle Court first when she was five years old, and then her little soul had rebelled at not being permitted to charge all about the big house, as she was free to do in the rectory at home. She had not coveted to remain at Lisle Court then, for the *régime* under which her cousins the baronet's daughters lived was far more rigorous than that which was exercised over herself at Baysford. She wore smarter frocks, and broader sashes, and brighter shoes than they did. Jam was no stranger to her young lips—theirs parted to utter

sentiments about it of that profound respect which can only come from an absolute ignorance of the dainty. She grew weary of the children's suite of rooms, from which under fear of divers kinds of penalties they were forbidden to stir. At five years old pretty little Alice Lisle was a child of nature, and preferred Baysford to the old baronial hall in which she was not permitted to run about.

She went to Lisle Court again on the occasion of the marriage of her eldest cousin, and then she was eighteen, and judged differently. Baysford Rectory lost by comparison with Lisle Court now, and the whole Baysford life seemed ignominious, and a thing fate had no right to condemn her to endure. For the first time she tasted the full delight of being a Lisle—for the first time the advantages of being one were made manifest to her. She was on a footing of equality here with those of an order who regarded her as immeasurably beneath them in Devonshire—where, as I have said, Mr. Lisle had no other than his professional position. Scanty courtesy after a patronising sort had been dealt to her by some of the magnates round Baysford, and she had accepted it gratefully, not knowing that in another place it was her due, and would be ceded to her willingly. But after that visit to Lisle Court when she was eighteen, Alice Lisle was not grateful for the hospitality the county magnates accorded her, nor was she prompt to accept with the ready smiles they had heretofore deemed so amiable the civilities they offered. She began to feel that there was no pleasure in being with but not of them. "I suppose you only visit the county people," her cousin Theodora had said to her. "I daresay that neighbourhood is dull for you, poor little thing! when they're all up in town for the season; but in the winter at least you have the best the neighbourhood can offer, haven't you?" And Alice to her own heart had been fain to confess that she had not, and that she never could have it whilst she was only Alice Lisle, the Rector of Baysford's daughter.

She had her little hopes and aspirations after a loftier fate when Sir Victor Cleeve came amongst them, a legal

victim, through being an unmarried man. Pretty Alice Lisle blushed joyously at herself in the glass as she thought of the possibility of effecting that change from the Rectory to The Chase for which after her visit to the latter her soul panted.

Mr. Lisle was an amiable man, fraught with good intentions which he always had the wish to carry out. That he did not do so on all occasions was due to a certain weakness of purpose and lack of ability; his were failures of the head, his heart was always in the right place. He wasted a great deal of time about Baysford professionally, and a great deal more in the composition of sermons that were not edifying when you heard them. But for all that he bored them in a variety of ways, his parishioners liked and respected him. He had a large stock of mental and bodily activity on hand, and these are things that become wearisome when the space for displaying them is small. Vestry meetings and parochial relief funds of various kinds assumed an undue importance in his mind, from the fact of this latter having nothing more important to employ itself upon. After her last visit to Lisle Court, pretty Alice Lisle found the discussion of these subjects unworthy, so to say, of the attention which had been directed to higher things. She also felt that it behoved her to stay at the Baysford Rectory and listen to them no longer, if she could get away to a sphere more worthy of her.

By this I do not mean to imply that she was dissatisfied or reprehensibly ambitious; she was only thrown off her mental balance a bit by the contrast between her own lot in life and the more brilliant one of her cousins, because they had the good luck to belong to the elder branch. The days were over now when she could delude herself into the belief that the advantages were on her side. At five years of age the best-boiled jam and the greatest liberty of limb had been hers, and the daughters of Sir Bernard Lisle had listened to her tales of indulgence in these luxuries with envious ears. But at eighteen their positions were reversed—all the luscious preserves that were for the delectation of "the family" were for them,

not for her. She was of importance only when the shadow of their roof-tree was upon her. At home, in Baysford, she was only pretty Alice Lisle.

And she was very pretty, very pretty indeed; though she had unfortunately missed all the best points of blood, still she was such a fair, rounded, womanly woman that she was very pleasant to look upon. She had chestnut hair, and plenty of it, and that clear complexion which often goes with chestnut hair. Her eyes were hazel, large and loving; and her skin was white and soft. She had a sweet and smiling mouth, neither formed to express passion or pathos perhaps, but just such a mouth as a man would like to see forming the words that his child was striving to utter. She was above the middle height, and was well formed, but not gracefully so. You would not have thought that she came straight from a racing stable. Rather a thick-set figure she had, in fact, and nice soft, white, big hands that would in time touch children very tenderly, but that were not made to be kissed and pressed. A very pretty girl guileless and good humoured, anxious to do what was right, and rather weary of life at the Baysford Rectory, and the incessant companionship of her papa and mamma—and withal, not at all oblivious to the chances and advantages thus suddenly thrown open to her by the advent of Sir Victor Cleeve.

No very dangerous rival to Madge Cleeve or Charlie in reality, you will say, and only promoted to the post of rival at all by Madge's overweening jealous fears. But these undesigning women, are uncommonly cute at carrying out their intentions sometimes. Their bland, trustful absence of artifice disarms other and cleverer women with whom they would not stand the shadow of a chance if these latter once suspected them.

"She's the prettiest pudding I ever saw," Miss Madge Cleeve said to her sister in relation to Alice Lisle when a few weeks' residence at The Chase had made them more intimate with their clergyman's family.

"And Victor seems to think so too," Charlie said, unconcernedly. Her sister's prophecy was fulfilled in a

measure. Charlie was ceasing to care for Vernon, and had responded with most amiable resignation to his offer of releasing her. But she had not learnt to think a marriage with her cousin Victor the summit of bliss yet; therefore she regarded his dawning passion for Alice Lisle with keen but kind eyes.

"Boys' tastes are so horribly unformed," Madge said, quietly; "otherwise Miss Alice Lisle should be free to continue those *tête-à-tête* rides in which they have been indulging lately. The sight of her waddling pony and her wobbling seat would cure most men; but Victor's very young; therefore, as our habits are home, we had better share in these equestrian excursions, Charlie." For Madge had bravely made that suggestion to her cousin about the income, and he had acceded to it at once—he was such a thorough boy still!

CHAPTER VI.

PICKLE LAGS BEHIND.

SIR VICTOR CLEEVE had organized his stable arrangements in a way that was very pleasant for those who were resident in his house. He had presented each of his cousins with a horse, and he had instituted a couple of hunters and a hack for his own special behoof. In addition to this he had asked Mr. Cleeve "whether he wouldn't like a cob?" And when Mr. Cleeve had rather curtly informed him that he "detested cobs," the accommodating young ward had immediately suggested, "or a pony-chaise, then, to drive your wife about in, sir." For Mrs. Cleeve was not much addicted to taking exercise in these days of their early residence at The Chase.

The Misses Cleeve had sent to London for their habits. They had accurately taken each other's dimensions, jotted them down carefully on a piece of tape, and forwarded them to a West-end tailor. The result was equal to their most sanguine expectations. If they rode as well as they looked, Madge felt as she stood before the glass drawing

on her gloves, Miss Alice Lisle would be utterly routed.

There had been a coolness between the sisters from the time that question of the income had been mooted up to the present. "It's downright begging," Charlie had said, indignantly; "downright low pettifogging begging to ask him for it, and to take it from him. His guardian, indeed! We've come down like a troop of ravening wolves upon him, poor boy!"

"What else was there left for us to do?" Miss Cleeve said, when Charlie concluded her protest.

"Do?—oh, all kinds of things; anything would be better than this system we're going on now."

"Go back to Sloane Street, for instance? that would be nice, wouldn't it, for a time? and then when papa couldn't keep on there any longer, go—God knows where."

The elder sister had spoken sternly and slowly; as she concluded, Charlie struck in with bright, nervous, refreshing accents.

"Ay, why not?" she asked: "we could be governesses, couldn't we, until such time as we married, for there are other men in the world besides Sir Victor Cleeve."

"You've soon forgotten the lesson Captain Vernon taught you, Charlie; you must have a wonderfully hopeful nature if you look to matrimony for an escape from the grovelling life we were leading when once men know how things really are with us. Here we are properly placed; but if papa had to leave The Chase without the security of one of his daughters being mistress of it, we should go down like stones to the bottom of the social sea. It's ridiculous your affecting to have scruples about the means employed to secure to ourselves that which we want; you can talk bravely enough about poverty, and bear it and its degradations and privations uncommonly well in the abstract. But yours is just the nature to rebel against it most violently when it has to be borne. You know how full of complaints and what a nuisance you were in Sloane Street, and how you upbraided your fate and your father."

Miss Cleeve had finished drawing on her gloves by the time she had brought her lecture to a close.

"You are very bitter, Madge," Charlie said, in a low voice. "I know that I've been impatient often when everything was wearingly petty as only poverty can be. But all the same I'd go back to it and endure it some way or other, rather than see this boy fleeced."

Then they went down and mounted the horses he had given them, and rode along into Baysford with Sir Victor Cleeve to call for Alice Lisle.

They were handsome, showy-actioned horses that he had procured for his cousins. Madge's was a bay mare with black points, and weedy, slender limbs. She had no bad habits, and her mouth was fine, therefore she was well suited to a lady who rode superficially well as did Madge.

Charlie's was a brown gelding, about fifteen hands high, with a power of trotting such as few women can appreciate. His canter was an atrocious thing, and his gallop was a mere furious burst of running away. But if his head were held, and he induced to confine himself to trotting, he was a horse whom to see was to love and to ride was luxury. Charlie could appreciate his trot, and had just the fine light hand that could hold him; therefore their union was a thing that was pleasant to the eyes of the uninterested observer.

But Alice Lisle was no longer an uninterested observer of anything that in any way might possibly affect Sir Victor Cleeve. So, though she was a guileless, good-humoured girl, she was considerably ruffled when she came out to mount her sturdy pony, by finding not only that his cousins had come to ride with them, but that they looked much better than she could flatter herself she did in the side-saddle.

"We shall have to keep along the dull roads, Miss Cleeve," she said, pettishly, going up to the side of Madge's horse to shake hands with that young lady, and tripping rather awkwardly in her habit as she walked; "those horses wont do for our heavy lanes."

"But I like the lanes, and what they lead to, best; therefore we mean to try them," Charlie said, as Miss

Lisle, with a rueful look still over her face, turned and spoke to her.

"Then you should have had ponies like mine; nothing hurts him, does it, Sir Victor? Don't I ride him over all sorts of places, often where he's up above his poor little knees in mud, and he's never the worse for it."

"Young lady seems fractious at our appearance," Miss Cleeve whispered to her cousin, and he coloured slightly and made no reply.

The Misses Cleeve rode well, and managed their horses with a skill that called forth ebullitions of boyish admiration and surprise from their cousin. Miss Lisle had a certain power of retaining her seat under adverse circumstances, but she did not do it in the way the others did. And Sir Victor marked the difference, and Alice saw that he did so.

While the habits had been in process of creation, he had been very uninterruptedly attentive to pretty Alice Lisle. During the course of those solitary rides they had taken over the hills and through the heavy lanes, he had practised saying a great many pretty things to her, and had blushed at them himself in a way that was gratifying to her woman's heart. Young masculine love, whatever poets may say to the contrary, is apt to be rather awkward, embarrassing indeed, more by reason of that quality than of its being impassioned. But still for all that, and though Victor's embryo attempts were no exception to the general rule, Alice had found those rides and those expressions very pleasant.

He had not fallen in love with her yet, but he was doing so gradually. Alice was not a girl to startle a man into a sudden passion; she rather crept over him. like a fog, or a feeling of sleepiness. He felt, some way or other, that he was a more imposing being to Miss Alice Lisle than he was to either of his cousins. Madge, to be sure, was bewitchingly gracious to him at all times, but she neither blushed nor trembled before him. And as to Charlie, that young lady was serenely and unaffectedly indifferent to him. Now, at nineteen, a man likes to feel himself capable of creating blushes and

tremblings. Therefore, Sir Victor was in a very fair way of falling in love with the one who gave them to him freely as did Alice Lisle. His advances had not been of a very marked character, and such as they were, they were redolent of extreme youth. He had joined her three or four times as she was riding through the Rectory gate, and had volunteered his escort. He had got off his own horse on one or two occasions, and lugged her sturdy, obstinate little pony, Pickle, through certain sloughs of despond to which he objected. And he had cut her a stick, a hazel twig, out of the hedge, and carved her initials (a gigantic A elbowing a tiny L off into space), on the knob at the top. These had been the extent of his attentions, but taking his youth into consideration, they meant a great deal.

"Can't we go a little faster?" Charlie asked, when the road lay level and well turfed at the sides before them for a considerable distance. "I believe, if I let him go, my horse will trot up to your mare's gallop, Madge. Let us try."

The four started off together, and Charlie's horse justified his mistress's anticipations of what he could do. Madge's mare seemed to be going easily, for she was a long-limbed and slinging-actioned horse, that covered a good deal of ground in her stride; but the little gelding pressed her hardly, and the gelding's mistress got excited, and was in no hurry to stop the pace.

Little Pickle had put his head down low, and laid himself out to do his best. But he was only a pony, with remarkably thick, short legs; and though he put them down manfully, he was soon left behind. And as the forms of the two fair sisters and their cavalier lessened in the distance, Alice Lisle felt aggrieved and lonely.

"We may as well walk, Pickle," she said, pulling up and patting her pony; "it was ever so much nicer when we rode alone. I shan't come out with the Miss Cleeves again in a hurry, if they're going to run off and leave me like this."

But it was not the Miss Cleeves deserting her that she cared about—as was evidenced by the brightening of

her countenance when Sir Victor came back and joined her.

"I didn't think what an abominable shame it was to leave you, till my cousin Charlie said so and sent me back," he said, as he wheeled round by Alice's side.

"Don't they ride, by Jove! You shall have a horse like theirs, Alice; and then we can all keep together. Pickle's a slow, lazy little beast after all."

Alice looked up at him and blushed. It was very sweet to her that he had come back, and left those fearless Amazons his cousins; he was a very handsome cavalier, though so young a one; so she blushed as she looked up at him and said—

"Oh! thank you; but wouldn't you rather go on to them now? Don't mind Pickle, and don't mind me."

"But I do mind leaving you alone; I couldn't do it. You wouldn't wish me to do it, would you?"

He was really progressing favourably: already it had come to him to soften his voice considerably when addressing a woman.

"No," she said; "that is, I liked riding with you, you know but now your cousins are here, I'm nothing, of course."

"Yes, you are to me, Alice dear," he said, "a great deal. Won't you be—won't you let me be, I mean? Yes, you will! A man doesn't let his cousins come between himself and any one he likes."

"A man" looked magnificently self-reliant, she thought, as he spoke, for Miss Alice did venture one timid glance towards him.

"And do you like me?" she asked. And if Sir Victor had not hesitated for a choice of words he would have made Alice an offer on the spot. As it was, he paused to pick a phrase that should sound noble and manly, and during the pause his cousins reappeared and saved him.

"Of course I do—very much indeed," he said, hurriedly. "I say, Alice, you must come to The Chase often."

"I hope you didn't mind our riding off in that way, Miss Lisle," Charlie said, brightly, as she came up.

And Miss Lisle simply and candidly assured her that she had not minded it at all.

CHAPTER VII.

MRS. LISLE SPEAKS AS A PARENT.

"ANOTHER time, Charlie, I'll thank you to pull up, when you know I can't stop the mare without it," Madge said, as she came into her sister's room, dressed for dinner, on the day of the ride.

"Pshaw! a fine-mouthed thing like that you could have stopped in a minute, without wanting me to give you a pull," Charlie replied, carelessly.

"I didn't find it so easy; besides, I didn't want to ride back to them alone; it would have looked like spying after them; whereas, if we had both gone back it would have been different."

"I don't think they wanted us when we did go back, and I never like being in the way."

"One of us must come in the way of Victor making a fool of himself with Alice Lisle," Miss Cleeve retorted sharply. "I've no fancy for seeing that very mediocre young lady defeat me with her country innocence and unsophisticated ways."

"Victor will be a great fool, if he is in love with her, if he lets himself be badgered out of it by you, Madge."

"It's very easy to talk noble sentiments when you have everything you want, as we have just at present, but you would be the first to knock Miss Lisle's absurd pretensions to pieces if you were tasting poverty again, and she stood in the way of your attaining riches."

"Madge! are you serious in meaning to blight every hope poor Victor forms that isn't built upon one of us?"

"Quite serious," Miss Cleeve said; and her face grew very white as she said it, and her eyes very dark. The younger sister turned away with a shiver.

"If you loved him it would be so different," she

began; "but he's such a boy to you in every way, that there can be no feeling of that kind; besides——"

"Besides what?" Miss Cleeve interrupted.

"Why," Charlie said, hesitatingly, "I thought you cared a little for Major Forster."

"He trifled with me, and I shouldn't care long for a man who did that, Charlie. So it seems to you," she continued, "that it would be an impossibility for love to exist between Victor and me. Why won't you win him for yourself, Charlie? I can give him up to you, if you'll take him."

Charlie gave an impatient gesture, and a frown flitted over her face.

"Better to be sold by one's parents than try to haggle oneself off in this way," she said. "Oh, Madge! what has come to you that you can talk of doing it, and feel no shame?"

"He would love *you* if you'd let him, Charlie, and then there would be neither sorrow nor shame in the marriage—for you would surely love Victor well in time—and that would not be long in coming. At any rate, whether you will take him or not, I'm determined Miss Alice Lisle shall not."

"Don't look to me to help you in making them unhappy, if they do care for one another," Charlie said, indignantly. "I'll aid him all I can, poor boy—I don't see why he is to be sacrificed to your abominable pride. Don't look to me to help you."

"I can suffice to myself as far as preventing that goes, Charlie. You needn't trouble yourself, you romantic little goose."

But the next day Miss Cleeve received most unexpected aid—from the very heart of the enemy's camp.

Victor had strolled out directly after breakfast, instead of, as usual, coming into his cousins' sitting-room and reading "Locksley Hall" aloud to them. Very young men invariably read abominably, and Sir Victor was no exception to the rule.

"I'm glad Victor isn't going to buzz at us all the morning," Charlie said, as she took her seat at her work-

table; "he's gone out to the stables, so he won't come in till luncheon is ready. An enterprising bee in a bottle wouldn't be half so monotonous as are the tones in which he bewails his cousin Amy."

"His reading is not the most delectable treat in the world, I must acknowledge," Madge said, laughing; "but it's not hurtful to us, though it's trying, and it keeps him out of mischief."

"All I am afraid of," said Charlie, "is that he will get so many rhymes into his head that he will twist and tangle them up unconsciously, and then give them forth as his own. It would be all very well if there were an authorized receptacle for it—such as I've no doubt, Alice Lisle will be, in course of time—but while I'm open to hearing it, I think he should be kept from going such lengths."

Miss Cleeve laughed, and drew a clever little caricature of Victor in the agonies of composition. But for all that, she felt that she would be a very lenient critic, should Victor ever elect to compose a sonnet to her eyebrow or the moon.

Sir Victor had gone to his stables the first thing after breakfast. It is astonishing how surely the footsteps of an English gentleman set towards the quarter where his horses are! But he had soon left his stable, and wandered down into Baysford to the Rectory-gate, where he was met by Miss Lisle, bent on a mission of mercy, upon which she had decided to adventure forth as soon as she caught sight of Sir Victor strolling down the village road—for it could hardly be called a street.

Ah! well, the best and purest women in the world are only human after all, thank God! Mrs. Lisle saw her daughter sally forth on her mission of mercy, accompanied by the young baronet, and she immediately put on her bonnet and went up to The Chase, to see how such proceedings were viewed in that quarter. She was a good woman, a devoted wife and mother, and a humble Christian; but she was fully alive to how vastly pleasant a place would be this vale of tears if her daughter Alice should become Lady Cleeve of The Chase.

But she was a wary parent! She did not desire that her child should be winged by this young sportsman, and then left to perish in the cold. The bird that Sir Victor brought down would have a high place in the land; the bird he merely wounded would be in an evil case. So, on seeing Sir Victor loiter lovingly outside the gate, and then rather effusively join the compact young charitable angel who sallied forth with broken meats for the poor, Mrs. Lisle put on her bonnet and resolved upon going up to The Chase, and speaking her mind as a parent.

Now, she was not acting solely on a blind maternal instinct in this matter, for Alice had told her what Victor had said when Pickle lagged behind. She thought it well that Sir Victor's guardian should clearly understand that attentions to Miss Lisle must mean something. A gentle, quiet, unassuming woman, she was fully alive to the claims her husband and her husband's child had on the consideration of the mightiest. And as the pair disappeared round a corner, she told herself proudly, that if Sir Victor Cleeve was a great man here, so was Sir Bernard Lisle in the distant county where she had gone twice, to her sorrow; for the Lisles of that ilk had snubbed her severely.

"I shall not say anything to Mr. Lisle about it till I have sounded the Cleeves, and let them see that I am not blind," she thought, as she walked along. She had an undefined feeling that while the affair was hovering on the brink of uncertainty, the paternal finger, if interposed, might do more harm than good.

She had no intention of adventuring into dangerous depths to take soundings; she thought that she would merely give them to know that she was no blind parent, and that if Sir Victor admired Alice, she, Alice's mother, would be more gratified than surprised. This was all she intended to say or imply. But the tongue is an unruly member, and Miss Madge Cleeve was very clever.

A doubt as to whom she should seek crossed Mrs. Lisle's mind as she walked over the bridge, but she had

resolved that doubt and come to a decision before her appeal at the bell was answered. Mrs. Cleeve was a nonentity, and nothing to the young baronet in blood. Mr. Cleeve was one of those terribly calm, well-bred men, to whom it is extremely difficult for a fussy woman to speak on a tender topic! Therefore she resolved upon seeing the young ladies, who "were just like his sisters," Victor had told Alice.

The young ladies were in their own sitting-room still, wishing that luncheon was ready, for sooth to say, the morning had been very tedious by reason of Victor's prolonged absence. It was not a fine bright, inspiring day, either, but a late, dull October one—for they had been at The Chase three months. They were glad, therefore, of the break to their rather monotonous gloom which Mrs. Lisle's advent offered.

She was a soft-toned, kind-eyed woman, with a habit of making herself pleasant to everybody; and better still, a habit of being pleased with everybody. So now she came in prepared to delight and be delighted with these girls, who were like sisters to Sir Victor Cleeve.

"So cosy and nice as you look here," she said, when she had shaken hands with them, "I declare it's quite a shame to come in and disturb you."

But she did not look as if she thought it a shame at all, or any other than a highly commendable proceeding on her part. Good-natured woman! she always looked sure of a welcome,—and what a vast assistance that look of happy assurance is to the one from whom, in the order of things, the welcome ought to come. She did not distrust these young ladies. She did not accredit to either of them designs antagonistic to the peace and weal of her child. Her child, on the contrary, distrusted them both; and with true feminine perversity and lack of judgment, that one the most from whom the least was to be feared. Alice Lisle could listen without emotion to Sir Victor's comments on the beauty—the proud, flashing beauty that put other women out, as it were—of his elder cousin. But when he spoke of Charlie's gentler loveliness, Miss Lisle waxed uncomfortable.

"You must stay and plead the cause of the harmonium fund with Sir Victor, Mrs. Lisle," Madge said, when the luncheon-bell rang. "He has been spending a happy morning with his horses, but he will come in when he hears the bell."

"I don't think that I can stay, my dear Miss Cleeve. No, don't ask me, for I didn't leave word, and we dined early, you know. I am afraid," she continued, with a transparent assumption of regret, "that Sir Victor won't hear the bell, and that he will lose his luncheon."

"He can hear it all over the grounds, and he is not likely to have gone off anywhere for a ride without wanting us to go with him," Madge said, carelessly.

"But my dear Miss Cleeve, I saw him in the village just now—a few minutes before I came up. Alice had said to me, 'Mamma, I shall take the basket off your hands to-day' (it's the people's dinners she meant—always give away four dinners on a Thursday), and as I was watching her out, to see whether she could manage to carry it well, I saw Sir Victor Cleeve, and he took it from her. So kind of him, oh! so very kind and thoughtful."

The vision of Sir Victor trudging through the dirty alleys of a village, with a large basket on his arm and Miss Alice Lisle by his side, was not a pleasant one to Madge Cleeve.

"Very kind, perhaps, Mrs. Lisle, but excuse me, rather thoughtless on Sir Victor's part, I think."

Mrs. Lisle flushed a little, and asked "Why?"

"Oh, if you are good-natured enough not to resent it on behalf of your daughter, I had perhaps better reserve my views. You *will* come in to luncheon, won't you?"

Miss Cleeve spoke with a ringing sweetness, but her eyes were flickering with rage; and the language of the eye was the true one.

"No, thank you," Mrs. Lisle answered, in more sober tones than she had employed hitherto. "I must go home—when you've told me what you think I ought to resent on behalf of my daughter."

She spoke very simply and earnestly, and Miss Cleeve

bit her lip with annoyance at being cornered by this quiet Devonshire lady, whose daughter dared to rival her with Sir Victor.

"It may be that I was wrong to say it, but in the school in which we have been brought up, such 'kind, thoughtful attentions,' even from very young men like my cousin, are considered compromising and detrimental to a girl."

"Absurdity!" Charlie struck in. One can't bring metropolitan manners and customs down into the country, Madge; don't mind her, Mrs. Lisle, she doesn't half mean it."

Mrs. Lisle looked kindly at the younger sister, but the elder one had wounded her in her tenderest point—maternal love and pride. She remembered that her pretty Alice, if she had not the air of these young ladies, was as well born as they were, and as gently nurtured. As a mother she felt that she could not stand by and hear the pretensions of her child to an honourable alliance slighted. So she spoke, despite the resolve she had made on quitting the Rectory, and spoke injudiciously.

"I scarcely thought Sir Victor's attentions to my child so marked as you seem to think them, Miss Cleeve. But if you do not over-rate them, you sadly underrate his honour, I think. He would not seek my child's side in the way he does, if he merely sought to compromise her in the eyes of her neighbours, and injure her in her own heart."

"No, you are right, he would not!" Charlie said, warmly, as Mrs. Lisle's speech came to a close by reason of her tears welling up.

"I hope you are right, I am sure," Miss Cleeve said, haughtily; "but if you are, my father, as Sir Victor's guardian, ought not to be kept in ignorance of the plans that are maturing for his ward's happiness."

And then Mrs. Lisle felt that she had said too much, and that she had better go home at once.

"Charlie! stay here, I want you!" Madge Cleeve said, as her sister prepared to follow the guest out of the room for the purpose of saying a few apologetic and

comforting words, and of encouraging her faith in Victor.

"You were going out to buoy that poor woman up with fallacious hopes," Madge continued, as Mrs. Lisle's footsteps died away, "and it would be but a cruel kindness, Charlie. Let her go home and arrange a match between her daughter and some neighbouring curate. I've not the remotest objection to Miss Alice bearing the hallowed name of wife. But she'd better 'ware meddling and manœuvring with Victor."

CHAPTER VIII.

A TRAITOR IN THE CAMP.

IN the meantime the pair over whose heads Miss Cleeve was arranging a thunder-storm had passed a very happy time of it. Sir Victor was still young enough to prefer being laden with a basket in the open air in the service of a pretty girl, to being condemned to the limits of a drawing-room, even in the same girl's society. He had a freer use of his legs and tongue—both performed their work more easily and cleverly. Striding along the foot-paths that led through his own fields and meadows he felt himself to be Sir Victor Cleeve. Sitting at Madge's feet reading Tennyson's poems, he was apt to be oppressed with the knowledge that he was only a big boy.

To tell the truth, he carried that basket with reprehensible carelessness. He swung it about from arm to arm according as Alice wanted his right or left hand to assist her in surmounting the difficulties of various stiles. They needn't have taken this field-path at all. The road was the straighter, nearer, easier way from the Rectory to the village. But the field-path was chosen by them for obvious reasons; the consequence was that the four dinners amalgamated themselves to the dire wrath of the recipients—and these insensible rustics breathed audible hopes that Miss Alice would not be similarly accompanied on her next mission of mercy.

The boy had no thought of serious love-making as he strolled by the side of pretty Alice Lisle. He found this variety of feminine companionship pleasant to him; he was not quite at home yet with older men—and his cousins he could have all day long for nearly two years if he liked. Therefore he was glad of even the limited choice which Alice's propinquity afforded him.

He thought her very pretty, very soft and peachy looking, with just enough little nervous indecision about her manners and customs to put him thoroughly at ease. But he had no thought of serious love making at all—this terrible cavalier who was to compromise and be detrimental to pretty Alice Lisle.

But with the girl it was different. She had lived a year less in the world than he had, but she was considerably his senior on this point of understanding her own sentiments and his. She knew that at present he would just as readily run after a terrier or a rat as her fair self. But she also knew that when he had overtaken either of the former, it would be incapable of calling that bright flush to his brow and flash to his eye that the warm pressure of her hand brought into being in a moment. So far she had the advantage of the terrier or the rat—when he was with her he preferred her to them. But when he was away from her she was neck and neck with them.

He had a grievance in these days. His father had told him that probably Drummond Cleeve would send him abroad with a tutor for the two years that intervened between his accession to the title and his coming of age. Now, Victor had not liked the tutor plan, but when he spoke to his guardian about going on the Continent for a few months "with some clever young fellow for a companion," his guardian had peremptorily refused to hear of his doing anything of the kind.

"You'll stay at The Chase, and not get into mischief while I've any control over you," he had said. And Madge, when she had heard of it, applauded her father's decision, but censured the terms in which it was given.

"You must learn to speak very gently to Victor,

papa," she said, "or he'll burst his bonds some day—before it will be well for us that he should do so."

"I'd go off without pa's leave if I were Victor," Charlie said, undauntedly. "Don't try to frown me down, Madge; I *would*—it wouldn't be a nice way of going, but that would be the fault of those who obliged him to act as a sneak and a coward."

Now, Sir Victor Cleeve had soon got over his desire to go abroad, but he could not so quickly get over his rage at being refused. It was the first thing in which he had been openly thwarted since he had become Sir Victor Cleeve, and he could not forget it.

"I should have left him the horses, and he could have lived as he liked at The Chase," he said to Alice, as they slowly sauntered through the meadow that opened into the Rectory garden—the last one they had to cross.

"How your cousins would have missed you if you had gone," Alice replied, plaintively.

"Oh no—not much, that is; Madge would a little, I daresay, and I should have missed Madge, for she's always ready to do anything a fellow asks her to do; but Charlie wouldn't."

"If I had been in their place I should, I think," Alice said, blushing very much, and glancing at him sufficiently to see the look that he did not bestow upon terriers and rats in his eyes.

"And wouldn't you have missed me as it is, Alice dear?" he asked. "I hope you would; I should be wretched now to go away and think that you'd forget me."

"I am not your cousin—of course I should be sorry, very sorry indeed; but if I were your cousin I couldn't bear it at all.

"Then you couldn't bear it now, or you wouldn't think you couldn't if you were my cousin?" he said. And considering that he was only nineteen, and had no experience of women, that was a wonderfully correctly drawn deduction.

Miss Alice Lisle was one of those sensible people who

never lose anything by precipitation. She perfectly realized the full force of Sir Victor's speech and all it was intended to convey. She knew that it was tender—and that he meant her to think it tender—but she also knew that there would be danger in betraying too great a consciousness of this tenderness.

"I don't know what you mean," she stammered; "I *do* know that I should be miserable, dreadfully miserable, if you went away, if you were my cousin."

"And so you would now, though you ain't my cousin, wouldn't you, dear Alice?—and I should be miserable to leave you, and I never will—and—here's your mother."

Yes, it was Mrs. Lisle coming towards them from the Rectory, with the gloom of that inauspicious visit to The Chase still upon her brow.

"What a time you've been Alice!" she began sharply; "make haste in now, and take off your hat—dinner's waiting." She was unhappy and annoyed about Alice, therefore it was quite natural that she should be a little angry with her—in all maternal fondness.

"What shall I do with the basket?" Sir Victor asked; "I've carried it all the way, Mrs. Lisle."

Mrs. Lisle looked at him and her heart relented. This young offender against her daughter's prospects looked guileless and handsome, and honest. She relented; and as he had lost his luncheon at home she asked him in to the early dinner at the Rectory.

So Alice and Sir Victor had another peaceful hour. She marked with surprise the avidity with which he eat. "How could he?" she thought, after those words of his in the meadow; they had taken away her appetite completely.

"I shall see you again to-morrow," he whispered, when he was going away. And while Alice was still trembling to those words and their import, he went home to his cousins.

Madge Cleeve had not required an additional motive to urge her on to the subjugation of this young cousin of hers. She had come to like him well—more than that, perhaps, for hers was a warm intense nature that did

nothing by halves. But even had she required an additional motive it would have been given her by the tidings that had been told to her that day after Mrs. Lisle's departure. Her father had married a second time when he deemed himself the heir to a baronetcy, hoping that a son would be born to him. And now, soon after he had realized his disappointment in the matter of title and wealth, there was an immediate prospect of that hope being gratified.

A life in obscurity with an infant in the house inefficiently attended, was a fate from which Miss Cleeve might well turn with loathing. "I must test my influence on Victor at once," she thought. So she dressed herself for the purpose, and contrived to be in the little drawing-room alone, from whence she could see his entrance into the larger one before dinner.

"Is that Victor?" she cried out, in her sweet full voice. And he answered her by going into her presence.

I have said that she had dressed for the purpose. And she had done so with a rare skill! She had used every art to heighten the contrast between her spirited proud beauty and Alice's tamer style. Her rich hair shone browner and brighter by reason of the black velvet passed through it, and as she lay back on a sofa with her back to the light, the pupils of her eyes dilated and grew large and seductively soul-subduing.

She had on a richly-trimmed transparent-substanced black dress, out of which her white neck and arms came with dazzling effect. And there was lace over her shoulders, and an atmosphere of perfume around her; and despite her sensuous nature and her plans, and her passionate determination to carry these latter through, there hung around her such an air of calm and repose.

He had time to mark this as he came towards her from the doorway, and to feel that it was what women of his order should have, and that Alice Lisle was deficient in it. Then he took the hand she extended to him, and sat down on a low stool at her feet, and murmured forth some boyish expressions of admiration for her beauty and affection for her.

She laid her hand on his waving curls, and just let her fingers fall upon his forehead. And then she asked him where he had been all day ; and while she was waiting for his answer her glorious eyes met his, and he saw that they were very mournful and tender.

"Have you had a pleasant day, Victor?"

He thought of Alice Lisle, and considered it pleasant ; he thought of the big basket, and here, in his cousin's presence, he had his doubts.

"Well! I haven't been doing much," he said ; Charlie and you didn't seem to care about going out this morning, so I just had a look at the horses, and then I strolled down into the village, and happened to meet Alice Lisle."

"Oh, yes, I heard of that!" Madge Cleeve answered, with the look of half-scornful amusement that is as galling to a boy as to any other human being.

"Who told you?" he asked sulkily.

She had turned her head away ; and now she looked back at him with an inquiring expression—as if the subject had already passed from her mind.

"Told me? Told me what? Oh! about Miss Lisle meeting you! Why, her mother came up in a great rush and hurry—vulgar woman she is—and talked a great deal of nonsense. I think she already looks upon The Chase as a place in which she'll have a maternal-in-law interest. Such fun—as if you were going to marry her daughter because you don't happen to know many other girls yet.

Again her hand was placed with caressing fondness on the curls that fell over his brow as he leant forward, sitting at her feet. And as he looked up she was smiling into his eyes.

"I don't know why I shouldn't marry her if I like," he said: "she's a very nice girl, but I don't care much about her. I don't know what her mother meant."

"My dear Victor, are you so innocent as you profess? Her mother meant that it would be a very nice thing for Miss Alice to be Lady Cleeve ; and so it would, no doubt. Therefore she wants it to be understood that if you carry a basket about the village like a tame dog for her daugh-

ter, that you ought to be considered engaged to her. And I say that, if that is the case, you ought to tell papa, in order that the future Lady Cleeve may be accorded all due honour.

"Oh, I say—come, Madge! it hasn't come to anything like that!" he expostulated, confusedly. He detested matrimonial arrangements being made for him in this way, and he felt particularly disgusted at being likened unto a tame dog. He did not altogether repent of the lengths to which he had gone in the case of Miss Lisle, but he loathed the remembrance of the basket.

"I hope it has not, dear, for your sake," she said, with an assumption of dropping badinage and levity. "Victor! your wife must be an elegant, high-bred woman—to match her lord."

And this bit of flattery perhaps did Miss Lisle's cause more evil than even her mother's ill-timed interference.

"I'd rather you'd not say a word about it to my guardian, Madge," he said, earnestly, as they heard Charlie coming along through the larger room. "Those old Lisles are hideous humbugs to have made a fuss. You won't, will you, Madge?"

And she told him "No—she would not!" this unscrupulous young lady. But for all the glibly-given promise, she had a long interview with her father that night; an interview that resulted in Mr. Cleeve giving her the assurance that he would go down to the Rectory to-morrow.

"If I could do it all single-handed, I would not trouble you in this way, papa," she said, sorrowfully. "Such work is uncongenial to you and to me, but we must do it, or we shall have more uncongenial work still to perform."

The following day, contemporaneously with Madge seeking her father in order to give him some final instructions as to the course of policy to be pursued at the Rectory, Charlie, for the first time since her residence in his house, sought her cousin Victor.

"If I put on my hat, and wrap myself up in something warm, will you take me all round the park Victor?"

she asked. "I know the undergrowth is tremendous, but I won't mind that: and we will take the dogs."

So the cousins started off happily together, and, for at least an hour after their departure, Madge was in blissful ignorance of the traitor in the camp being in uninterrupted possession of the besieged youth.

"I wish I were you, Victor!" Charlie exclaimed after a time, when a mutual course of danger run through brambles and bushes, had made them very intimate in an hilarious way they rarely attained to in the house.

"Do you? Why?" he asked. He valued his superior advantages in being a man very highly indeed; but still, as he looked at Charlie's lovely face flushed with exercise, he did wonder at her wishing to be anybody but her beautiful self.

"Because yours is such an independent position," she replied. "Papa is your guardian—nominally lord of your actions for another year or a little more, of course—but in reality yours is such an independent position. No one," she continued, her eyes flashing proudly, "has the right to say you nay in anything, if the thing you desire to do is not wrong."

"Your father wouldn't let me go on the Continent," he said, and that wasn't wrong.

"Papa was, to prevent your going—I'd have gone. There, I don't mean to blame papa; he does all for the best. But don't let any one else rule you, Victor, and turn you from doing what you wish to do, if it's right.

He paused thoughtfully for a minute or two, and then he made a clean breast of it about Alice Lisle and Madge's comments thereon.

"And why shouldn't you care for Alice, Victor? She's a dear, pretty girl, and I think she's very fond of you: and if you love her, no one has the right to interfere between you. Don't be hectored and turned about like a weathercock. Tell Madge that if it's wrong to walk about with a girl you love if you are not engaged to her, that you'll be engaged to her at once, and marry when you're of age. And I'll be one of your bridesmaids—I mean one of Alice's."

"What a darling you are!" he said, enthusiastically. He was full of honour and pride, and he liked Charlie to king it for granted that an appeal to it would tell. He liked Alice Lisle very much indeed, but Charlie stirred his blood to a quicker flow with her daring counsel and her defiant honesty. If she had been a boy he would have called her a brick, and a regular trump with no end of pluck. As it was, he contented himself with observing that she was "so jolly—she spoke out so." He then informed her that he didn't care whether there was a "howling row" or not; but that he should certainly act on her advice and engage himself to Alice Lisle.

She blushed as he went on praising her, and thanking her, and being gratefully affectionate to her. Blushed, and strove to conquer her blushes, in order that she might frankly meet his gaze as a sister would have done. Hers was a glorious, pure nature; it recoiled from all baseness, and, at the cost of any pain to herself, she would persist in being more than just to others. It was apparent to the girl that Victor would have been quickly won to love her, but she thought that he had won another girl to love him before, and that he would be very happy with gentle Alice Lisle. All her spirit rebelled against luring away what had been given to another. So she subdued her blushes, and her eyes met his as a sister's might have done.

CHAPTER IX.

DRUMMOND CLEEVE ON HIS RESPONSIBILITIES.

WHEN Charlie came in rather tangled from her long walk round the park and through some of the fields with Victor, her sister asked her sharply where she had been.

"Compromising my character in the village, and doing great detriment to my boots in the fields under Victor's auspices," she replied. "I'm as young a lady as Alice Lisle, and I have been guilty of perpetrating the same

enormity she was guilty of yesterday for a more prolonged period, that's all."

"What you do and what Miss Lisle does are utterly different things," Madge said, coldly. But though she expressed such a decided opinion as to the relative importance of the respective acts, Miss Cleeve was in reality no better pleased with the stroll of the present than she had been with the one of the past day. Alice Lisle's possible claims or attempts on Victor she would not scruple to quash and put down with a strong hand. With Charlie's, should that young lady ever essay to make them, she could not in conscience or prudence essay to interfere.

And she would suffer through her inability; for, practised woman as she was, she had come to love that bright-faced boy, who was so full of undeveloped manliness and honour. Repeatedly she told herself that her passion was unworthy of her. Ah! but then the object of it was not, and the repetition of the truth was useless. She had sworn, in cold blood, to marry him herself or unite him to her sister, and now she was punished for having taken the rash, unwomanly oath by feeling that every tender, womanly fibre in her being had wound itself around him, and would only be torn away to the destruction of her happiness and heart. She had contemplated doing an evil deed for the attainment of this world's goods, and now she was getting a preliminary taste of that suffering for which no amount of this world's goods can afford the smallest compensation. His tender grey eyes and his carved curls were to the full as much to blame in the matter of this easy conquest which he had made, as his manliness and impetuous, fascinating honour and honesty. Had he been a freckled youth, with expressionless orbs, no matter how fraught with noble qualities, Madge would have been wiser.

When Charlie left him, Victor strolled up and down for a while on the modern terrace that had been raised on the banks of the ancient moat. He had three or four dogs at his heels, and when he didn't give his mind to their evolutions, he revolved in it what Charlie had said

about Alice Lisle. She had told him bluntly that no one had either the right or power to say him nay in anything, if the thing he desired to do was not wrong in itself. And she had further hinted that she was aware that steps would be taken to mar the fair surface of the calm lake of love on which he had been idly floating for the last few weeks. "I'll let her see that I am not to be turned from my purpose like that," he thought, and he almost resolved to go down to the Rectory at once, and take immediate steps towards aggrandizing himself in Charlie's good opinion by coming to a definite understanding with Alice. However, before he had gone many yards in pursuance of this intention, his resolve was weakened by an event and a reflection.

The reflection was that after all, though he had carried her basket through the village and lugged her pony through the mud, he was not prepared when it came to the point of solemnly declaring himself ready to love her and her alone through all time. She was not likely to be spirited away, this earliest angel of his imagination; so he resolved to wait and follow up the event to which I alluded in the previous paragraph.

The event was the bursting from a hole in the bank of an able-bodied rat, after which his terrier Trim shot with an avidity and wholesome, hearty enthusiasm that quickly communicated itself to the master's mind. At the stage of existence at which he had arrived, a rat was a more exciting one than a love chase.

In the meantime Drummond Cleeve had gone down to the Rectory armed with his eldest daughter's counsel and a sense of his own responsibilities. It was his first call at the Rectory, and only a keen sense of Sir Victor's danger could have induced him to make it at all. He was a punctilious gentleman about most things, but he was not punctilious about such trifles as returning clerical calls. He was courtly in his manners to every one whom he came athwart, but he never shook hands with surgeons or lawyers, or mixed on terms of social equality with clergymen, unless the latter were elevated in his estimation to a hand-shaking position by being members of some mighty

tribe. He had a way of treating Mr. Lisle as if that gentleman were his private chaplain when Mr. Lisle called at The Chase. And Mr. Lisle did not care particularly about being so treated, and therefore did not call at The Chase very often.

Mr. Cleeve did not like the plan of action that his eldest daughter had sketched out for him this morning. He wanted to live at The Chase, and have every luxury and no trouble. He wanted security—the security of seeing one of his children Lady Cleeve. But he could have wished that they had taken the onus of attaining unto this desirable position entirely upon themselves. He merely aspired to share in the good results.

“Master was in the library, writin’ his sermon,” the servant told him, “and missus and Miss Alice was in the drawing-room.” He would willingly have declined so much as a sight of the ladies had freedom of action been permitted him. His business was with the head of the house, and he was in haste to get through with it. However, the handmaiden precipitated herself into a room and announced him with a velocity for which he was totally unprepared. In a moment, he knew not how, he found himself in the presence of the fair rock on which his daughters might possibly split, and the fair rock’s mamma.

Alice Lisle was just a little pleasurably embarrassed at sight of him. She thought he was come, like a stage guardian, with his consent and blessing. Her mother remembered her interview of the previous day with this gentleman’s daughter, and was embarrassed likewise, but not pleasurably so. Mrs. Lisle had stronger doubts than before arise in her mind immediately as to the judiciousness of that proceeding of hers which she had told herself the previous day was simply a piece of parental precaution.

The women had nothing to fear from Drummond Cleeve conversationally, for he was a gentleman, and shrank from uttering anything that savoured of unpleasantness to a woman—if she were not allied to him. He sat in that Rectory drawing-room for full five minutes and made himself delightful to the occupants thereof.

He admired the view from the south window. He thought the harmonium a not-to-be-sufficiently applauded innovation. He commended the parochial arrangements (of which he knew nothing) and the doctrine which homodadally emanated from the Baysford pulpit (of which he knew less). And then, having succeeded in allaying the worst of Mrs. Lisle's fears, he asked if he could see her husband for a few minutes alone, on a matter that was rather important.

Mrs. Lisle was a rigorous member of the faith she professed, as well as a good woman in the main. But at that moment she did wish that she could tell a falsehood and get absolution for it, and believe in the condonation. She dreaded her husband and Sir Victor's guardian coming in contact after her false move of the day before, and yet she could not bring herself to say that Mr. Lisle was either out or too much engaged to see this terrible visitor.

"I will go and speak to Mr. Lisle," she said, and the colour flushed her face as she said it, and she looked anxious and distraught. She meant to go and prepare her husband in a measure for what was to follow, but when she came into his presence her purpose failed her, and she merely mentioned the fact of Mr. Cleeve desiring to see him.

"I suppose he won't mind coming in here, will he?" Mr. Lisle asked. He was perfectly aware that this could be no mere civil, idle morning call, made out of politeness; consequently he deemed it better to treat it as if he supposed it to be nothing but business from the first.

"Ask him to come in here. I suppose he won't mind that, as he's taken the trouble to come down instead of sending for me," Mr. Lisle repeated. "I can't imagine what has gone wrong," he continued, and I shouldn't have suspected him of caring to interfere about the parish." And then poor Mrs. Lisle went away to tell Mr. Cleeve that her husband would be happy to see him, without having made her confession.

Drummond Cleeve disliked this duty to which he had been urged by Madge, and his repugnance to it clouded

his brow, and stiffened his bearing, and rendered him altogether less amenable to anything like friendly advances than Mr. Lisle had ever seen him before. He was conscious of this in a measure himself, therefore there was no resentment in his heart at his uncongeniality being reflected in the manner of this gentleman whom he had come to wound and insult as father and man.

"I fear I disturb you?" he said, glancing towards the fiftieth page of the sermon for next Sunday, on which the ink was not dry; "but the fact is, I considered it a duty both to you and myself to communicate with you without delay, in consequence of something which came to my knowledge yesterday only."

Mr. Lisle motioned to his visitor to take a chair, and then serenely seated himself in happy unconsciousness of what this "something" could be.

"If you're alluding to the contemplated scraping of the pillars in the centre aisle," he said, "I can assure you that before it is decided upon you would have been consulted, and I'm convinced that when it is laid before you, you will perceive at once how desirable it will be to remove the whitewash perverted taste has covered them with for years."

Mr. Drummond Cleeve inclined his head in haughty indifferent assent. It mattered very little to him whether the stone pillars were displayed in all their pristine beauty through the removal of the whitewash or not.

"I was not alluding to that," he replied, "but to a statement Mrs. Lisle made yesterday to Miss Cleeve—my eldest daughter—which seems to call for investigation on my part and explanation on yours."

Mr. Lisle turned hot and cold. Sir Victor was the patron of this Baysford living! Could his wife, his good-hearted but not too clear-headed wife, have been airing some of his theological views up at The Chase and making mistakes of divers sorts about them? He had been accused of a tendency to Puseyism, and for aught he knew the ruling power at The Chase now might be Evangelical! There would be a collision!

"I shall be most happy to give it, I am sure," he said.

And then Mr. Cleeve, finding that he was in for it, laid himself against the collar manfully.

“My responsibilities as the guardian of the son of my late cousin are very great,” he said, “and Mrs. Lisle in the course of a call she did my daughters the honour of paying them yesterday, spoke of the impossibility of anything but an engagement eventuating from the line of conduct he is pursuing towards Miss Lisle. Before I spoke to Sir Victor on the subject I judged it better to hear from you how far your countenance has been given to an affair that, I regret to say, does not redound to the credit of any one concerned in it.”

“Mr. Cleeve, I cannot have understood you aright!” Mr. Lisle had been made once or twice to taste of the waters of mortification during his life, but this was a cruel draught.

“I cannot have understood you aright;” he repeated. And then Mr. Cleeve smiled with barely concealed scorn, and said he had endeavoured to render his meaning plain.

“I am utterly ignorant of anything that could lead Mrs. Lisle to make—to suppose—in fact, I think it impossible that Mrs. Lisle could have intended to convey such a meaning to your mind. I regret exceedingly that such a meaning should have been conveyed; but I can offer no other explanation than the supposition that your over-anxiety on behalf of your ward, Sir Victor Cleeve, has induced you to misconstrue what my wife may have said.”

Mr. Lisle laid an emphasis that was unpleasant to the guardian’s ears on the words—“your over-anxiety on behalf of your ward.”

“Miss Cleeve was my informant,” he replied, “and Miss Cleeve is neither in the habit of rushing at conclusions nor making mistakes. If Mrs. Lisle has done so, there is an end of the matter, and I can only apologize for troubling you about the imaginative error of your wife. But if Sir Victor Cleeve has by his conduct given rise to the supposition of his unconventional and thoughtless attentions to your daughter resulting in an offer, I have nothing to apologize for, for it was essential that I

should have your aid in putting an end to such an absurdity at once."

"I shall be happy, nay, I am anxious to do whatever shall seem right to you," Mr. Lisle responded; "but I move like a blind man at present. I am neither conscious of anything that deserves reprehension in the manner of your ward, nor that calls for an alteration in that of my child.

"I must leave it to you, as her father, to decide on what may seem fitting to you in the case of your daughter," Mr. Cleeve replied. "As to Sir Victor, you will see at once the absurdity of contemplating an alliance with him, I'm sure, and you will also recognise the impossibility of my exercising a strict supervision over all the follies of youth. As his guardian I should resolutely set my face against his making a *mésalliance*. Have I said enough?"

"You have, Mr. Cleeve," the rector of Baysford replied. And it was by a strong effort that the churchman overcame the man, whose desire it was to kick this insulting patrician out of the house to which he had come fraught with such selfish, unfeeling scorn.

Before Sir Victor Cleeve's guardian had gained the Rectory garden gate, Mr. Lisle had called the wife of his bosom into his presence for a private conference.

"What is this—this folly about Alice and Sir Victor Cleeve?" he asked angrily. And then Mrs. Lisle "up and told him" all she had heard, and said, and thought.

"And he *does* like her,—and why shouldn't he indeed, I'd like any one to tell me? In spite of all they may say, and for all their pride, and plotting and planning, we'll see her up there if we only let things alone,—and trust in the Lord," she hastily added, as a remembrance of how nice D.V. always looked in a letter shot across her mind.

"But it's a case in which I can't let things alone, after having been attacked in such a manner," Mr. Lisle rejoined. "I couldn't have believed that you would have been so *imprudent*, my dear, as to go up there and lay yourself open to this sort of thing. He downright told

me that he should regard it as a *mésalliance*, and I had to listen to it—to listen quietly.”

I think at that moment, for the first time since his ordination, the heart of the minister of God rebelled against the fate which had made him such. If it had not been for the white neck-tie and black coat, no man would have calmly completed the sentence which began by informing him that an alliance with his child would be considered a match beneath the dignity of the proudest in the land.

“I had to listen to it—to listen quietly,” he repeated; “but I don’t think I could do it again. I don’t think that any man would stand up before me a second time, and tell me that an alliance with her would be a *mésalliance*, without my making him eat his words or retract them.”

“I didn’t mean to have brought anything like this upon you,” Mrs. Lisle sobbed. “I only thought to let them see that I wouldn’t look on and see the child trifled with. I never said that it ‘must come to an engagement.’ Oh, my gracious, the wickedness of that Miss Cleeve, to say I said it! I only said that if it didn’t, Sir Victor was different to what I thought him—and I say so still.”

“For all that,” Mr. Lisle said, gravely, “Alice shall go away for a time. I don’t mean to have it said that we are trying to make this young man forget what is due to his rank and his guardian. Alice shall go away and stay with her cousins at Lisle Court, and then Mr. Cleeve will come here and insult me at his peril; for, by heaven, I don’t think I can stand more of it!”

But the mother wailed over the cruelty and the ultimate evil results of this move. “What young man, or what young woman either, for that matter,” she asked, “had stability to stand against such an entire tearing asunder of all ties? If Alice were sent away now to Lisle Court, they might bury the hope for ever at once, of seeing her at The Chase.”

“I never had the hope of seeing her there,” Mr. Lisle rejoined, “and now I should dislike the idea excessively.”

The boy may be a very nice boy, and a very good boy, but no fit husband for a Lisle, after being tutored in the idea that a marriage with one would be a *mesalliance*.

There was no appeal against his decision,—there never is against the decision of men who but seldom assert themselves. Alice was packed off to Lisle Court for a period in a flood of tears. Her father said nothing to her about the cause of her abrupt dismissal from the dangerous vicinity of the baronet, who was still a minor. But her mother told her all she knew and thought, and a great deal more beside.

"They must know he's very fond of you, or they'd never have taken all this trouble for the little I said," Mrs. Lisle whispered consolingly, after she had given her daughter the crushing intelligence that she was to be sent off to Lisle Court without seeing Victor again.

"Oh, mamma! why did you say anything?" Alice asked piteously. "and now there's nothing, nothing, nothing to say."



CHAPTER X.

THE BROKEN TOY.

It was in vain that Victor called at the Rectory that afternoon; he only saw Mr. Lisle, who was courteous, but not specially kind to him. He dared not ask for Alice, and Alice was not offered to his view; therefore he went away without seeing her, and paraded the village for some time, loudly scouting and correcting his dogs. But no Alice came forth on a mission of mercy this day; and finally, Sir Victor Cleeve went home to dinner very cross indeed.

Charlie knew nothing of that visit her father had paid to the Rector of Baysford that morning. They deemed it wiser to keep her in ignorance; and, as far as their plot was concerned, they did well.

"Have you seen Alice Lisle?" Charlie asked him, in a low voice, when he came and seated himself by her

in the evening; and her scented golden hair brushed against his cheek as he leant forward to listen to her.

"No," he said; "Alice Lisle is a little humbug, and she's kept herself shut up all day; I haven't been able to see her."

"Don't let them manage you, Victor, if you want to see her, she answered; "a girl can't always do as she pleases, but don't let them manage you."

"If she'd half the pluck that Madge and you have, Charlie, she would not be managed either," he whispered.

"Ah! you haven't tried her pluck yet. You don't know what she will do till you ask her!"

"No, I don't!" he answered; and he speculated while he was answering as to how much Charlie herself would do, if he asked her.

"Well, as you have begun flirting about the village with her, you must not let her be hectored and scolded for nothing—because that wouldn't be manly," Charlie said; "if you like her, that is," she added; and when she added this she glanced very keenly at her cousin.

"I hardly know whether she *has* pluck enough for me," he replied, rising up; and he thought—"By Jove! she'd never flash her eyes out at me as Charlie did then! She couldn't—she hasn't it in her!"

The journey to Lisle Court, away in the distant eastern county, was a very tedious one to poor Alice Lisle. She felt that she was being sent away like a naughty child; and she resented such treatment, for the fruit at which she had timidly nibbled had never been forbidden, and it had been hung temptingly within her reach.

"Don't fill the child's head with nonsense; don't say anything more to her about the boy!" her father had said to her mother. But all the time he had known how powerless he would be to prevent confidences passing between the mother and daughter on the subject of Sir Victor Cleeve. The feminine incapacity for being silent and discreet had never been more galling to him than now, when it had been the not very remote cause of his

arrogant neighbour putting his foot on the neck of a Lisle.

"You may depend upon my not saying a word to her that all the world mightn't hear, Mr. Lisle," his wife replied, with as much dignity as she could assume under the consciousness that she was at that present moment burning to go up stairs and tell Alice that Sir Victor had just passed, "looking dreadfully disconsolate." "And as far as that goes," she continued, "all the world might have heard what I said the other morning up at The Chase. Any mother would have said it; and as you ask me, I will say that I don't think you're doing your duty in sending Alice away."

"I didn't ask you anything about it, my dear; and I understand what my duty is in this case clearly. We won't talk about it any more, if you please. And don't you keep up a fictitious interest for this young man in Alice's heart—for it can only tend to her ultimate disappointment and unhappiness. Nothing can come of it—he's to marry one of his cousins."

"Ah-h!" Mrs. Lisle said, angrily shaking her head. She was a gentle, pious woman, but it was too great a trial of her gentleness and piety to hint that one of these girls, who had essayed to mar Alice's fortune with Victor, should gain that young gentleman in holy matrimony for herself. Her "Ah-h!" meant great disapproval and doubt, and scornful disbelief of either of them doing anything of the kind. It meant that they wouldn't do so if she were left free to manage matters for her daughter without any paternal interference. "Marry one of his cousins, indeed! He'll not do that, even if you are induced to put an end to this between Alice and himself!" she said. And then Mr. Lisle lost patience a little—as men will do when women talk up an intangibility and strive to force them to act upon it—and resolved more firmly than ever upon sending Alice off to Lisle Court.

And a tedious journey poor Alice had, for the sense of her disappointment was very strong upon her, and she could not lessen her burden by speaking about it.

Her father accompanied her himself, for obvious reasons. In the first place, the Monday on which he elected that Alice should leave Baysford was the first day of the washing week; and in the second place, glad as Mrs. Lisle would have been to have afforded sympathy and comfort to her child, she did shrink from going again to Lisle Court. So when her husband said, "I shall take Alice over, give her a day in London, and come back myself on Thursday," Mrs. Lisle assented as gladly as she could to any part of a plan that was so odious to her as was this one of removing Alice from the enamoured young baronet's vicinity. "I suppose you won't leave her there for long?" she asked. And he answered—

"Well, if Lady Lisle likes, Alice may as well remain there for two or three months. I shall just mention the reason to them, and I'm sure then that they'll see the thing as I do, and keep her out of the way."

"I dare say they will—she not being their own daughter, they'll think it too good a match for her," Mrs. Lisle said, angrily, in reply to this.

And then Mr. Lisle forgot that he was a minister of a religion of patience, peace, and charity, and exclaimed—

"Lord bless me, you're enough to drive a man mad, Mrs. Lisle, with your confounded folly. You can't think that I'd set my face against the match if it was going to be a match? but I ain't going to have any boy, be he baronet or not, and his guardian running after me and my daughter, and insulting us by telling me, that of course they 'mean nothing,' before I ever thought they did. "No! I am not going to be told anything of that sort again.

And Mrs. Lisle did not dare to say another word when she had such unmistakable evidence of her husband being seriously put out.

She had promised her husband to be discreet—and in all honesty she meant to keep her promise. But the sight of Alice's pale face during the last half-hour they spent together was too much for her.

"I really think your father has forgotten that he was

a young man once himself," she said, as Alice was tying on her bonnet, preparatory to starting; "to drag you off out of the young man's reach because his stuck-up old guardian has chosen to speak out unpleasantly before Sir Victor had spoken out to you. I've no patience with him!"

"And I've no patience with pa, either," Alice muttered, tearfully. Her feelings were none of them very strong, but the prospect of a life at The Chase and the love of the owner of it had aroused some of the strongest of which she was possessed.

"Well then, don't cry, dear; what is to be will be, and if he's the young man I take him for, your being sent away won't alter his mind, for it's set on having *you* as clearly as any one's I ever saw." And then Mrs. Lisle wound up with a local couplet about a pear being more highly appreciated if it wasn't mellow enough to fall without the tree being shaken.

The Rector of Baysford and his pretty daughter were well on their journey before Sir Victor became acquainted with the fact of his first love having been spirited away from him. He had been for a long ride with Madge, who had given no sign of a desire to call at the Rectory for Alice Lisle, and they were returning about four o'clock, when they overtook Mrs. Lisle walking alone in the village street.

They pulled up to speak to her, and Madge knowing that she would be regarded by Alice's mamma as an active agent in the discomfiture which would probably overtake that young lady now her father had been harassed on her account—Madge, knowing all this, proceeded to make numerous and hurried enquiries as to the welfare of some sick parishioners.

"Well, I've not had time to see them to-day," Mrs. Lisle replied, and her weariness, as she spoke, was so marked a thing that Madge was compelled to notice it.

"You seem tired, Mrs. Lisle," she said; "come, Victor, Mrs. Lisle has some little way to walk still—we must not keep her standing."

"Oh, but I've nothing more to do in the village," Mrs. Lisle answered "and I'm in no hurry to get

home, as you'll understand, Miss Cleeve, when I tell you that Mr. Lisle and Alice are gone to pay a visit to Sir Bernard and Lady Lisle."

"Alice gone away?" Sir Victor asked, eagerly; "she never told me; when is she coming back?"

"Not for several months—if she does at all," the mother answered, with a certain air of triumph that came of the delight she experienced at seeing Sir Victor looking excited and annoyed at her tidings. Miss Cleeve had her triumph, too. But she enjoyed it quietly and made no sign.

"Why didn't she tell me?" he repeated, impatiently, "I didn't think she'd have gone off like that after—after—" and then he hesitated, and left his sentence unfinished, for he remembered what Madge had said—and Madge was by now to hear.

"Perhaps she didn't know it when she saw you last—indeed I know she didn't, Sir Victor. Oh! it will be a nice change for Alice—a very nice change indeed, to get away from this dull little Baysford to Lisle Court, which is such a pleasant place, only four or five miles from Cambridge."

"How considerate of Mrs. Lisle to tell you the precise locality of Alice's abode for the next few months!" Miss Cleeve observed, laughingly, when they had bidden Mrs. Lisle good evening. "Poor Alice! I think the embers of some by-gone flirtation with a Cantab must have been set alight again, or she would never have gone off without letting you know, Victor. I *did* think you had made a deeper impression on the pretty Devonshire dumpling: now I begin to fear that it's only on the more mercenary mamma."

She mentioned the subject lightly at dinner, and her father remarked on what a bore it must be to Sir Bernard Lisle to have relations of that sort fasten themselves upon him in such a way.

"It's only one relation, after all," Charlie said; "it isn't like a whole family going and settling itself down at Lisle Court." And she said it with such an emphasis that Madge blushed and Victor laughed.

Sir Victor knew nothing of that visit of Mr. Cleeve at the Rectory; therefore, though he was slightly depressed at Alice's departure, he was affable with the whole family. He had not dreamt of such a move having been made against him, and Madge felt it would be well to keep him in ignorance if she could.

"So Alice Lisle is gone away of her own free will, and we shall have no more trouble about her, thank goodness," Madge said to her sister as they crouched after dinner over the fire for the few minutes that intervened between their entering the drawing-room and their father and cousin joining them. Charlie took no notice of the speech, but Miss Cleeve saw that her sister's usually pale cheek was flushed, and that her lips had parted with a quick, impatient breath.

"Did you hear what I said about Alice Lisle, Charlie?" she asked.

"Yes, I heard what you said."

"Why didn't you answer it, then?"

"I'd no answer to make."

"It doesn't interest you at all. I forgot when I spoke that you always profess indifference about Victor."

"I am not indifferent about Victor, and I don't profess to be; and that's the very reason (if you will have one) why I didn't speak when you alluded to the result of your machinations against him and Alice Lisle."

"Machinations! What a grand word to use about my poor little endeavours to deter him from throwing himself away without sufficient cause."

"Don't joke about it, Madge," Charlie exclaimed, rising and throwing herself into a chair; "don't joke about it. I hope that you have done no harm; I hope it heartily. But if you knew that you were doing harm you wouldn't stop; if you knew that Victor adored a woman you wouldn't scruple to turn him from her at the cost of any pain to them both."

"I would not, you are right; unless that woman were yourself," Madge said, turning round, with the bright blaze lighting up her face with a lurid unnatural beauty.

"I would not stand at *anything*, unless that woman were

you, Charlie," she continued, rising to her feet, and meeting the haughty indignation of her sister's glance with one that was equally haughty and determined.

"Make no exception in my favour," Charlie exclaimed, passionately. "While you can feel like this I can take no promise of favour from you, Madge. While you can feel like this there can be no real love in your heart for any one. Make no exception for me—make no exception for me."

"Do you mean me to believe you, and take you at your word, Charlie?" Miss Cleeve asked, in a low voice, laying her hand on her sister's as she spoke. "I always mean what I say myself. If you mean that, let what will come, you'll not accept the exception I offered to make should you be Sir Victor's final choice. If you really *mean* it, Charlie, clasp my hand, and—I'll promise you to make none."

Almost unconsciously the younger girl tightened her fingers round the hand of the elder one.

"You chill my blood with your fixed resolves," she began, in an impassioned tone. "You make me dread and despise you, Madge. You make me tremble for your honour or your brain. You make me feel that, unless you alter and soften, we shall never know happiness again."

She paused, and looked anxiously in the face which was bending over her; she paused and looked for an answer in the eyes, if the lips would not speak. And no answer came.

"Alice Lisle is gone," she went on presently; "but if she comes back again, or if he loves another girl, spare him, Madge; don't plot, and plan, and palter, and live a lie for the sake of marrying a man you don't love because he's a baronet, and the owner of The Chase."

"You will always doubt my loving him, I suppose," Madge said, quietly.

"Yes, always," Charlie answered, hotly. "If you *loved* him I could forgive so much—so much; but as it is, you are ready to blight him on every path that he takes that doesn't lead to you. If you loved him, you'd

go to papa, and say, 'My oath was foolish, and wicked, and vain, and I'd rather die than fulfil it, if he doesn't ask me of his own free will.' No, you would not even say *that*, if you loved him. You'd pray papa to take you away where you wouldn't be led into the temptation of wishing to be his wife, when he doesn't wish it himself. You *couldn't* plot, and intrigue, and talk over the chances, and try to drive him up into a corner, if you really loved him."

"You know well what the one who really loves Victor would do, Charlie!"

"I know very well what I should do myself."

"Yes," Miss Cleeve replied; "you rendered the correct line of conduct to be pursued most feelingly. Well, in future we'll cease from this subject—I can look for no aid from you, I find; you have rejected what I offered; you have scorned the promise of the sisterly love and forbearance I would have shown towards you. For the future I shall go on my path alone; and I wont turn aside from it even for you."

She turned and left the room as she finished speaking. When Sir Victor and Mr. Cleeve came in shortly after, they found Charlie alone and crying.

"What is the matter?" her father asked; "it's singular that when a woman has everything to make her happy she selects that special occasion to dilute with her tears. What *is* the matter?"

"Nothing, papa!—the merest trifle that is—only that Madge has broken the last toy we've kept from our childhood."

Mr. Cleeve only said "Oh!" but Victor came soon, and sat down by her, and entreated her to tell him "what the toy was; and couldn't he replace it?"

And she told him, "No; that it couldn't be restored even by him!"

CHAPTER XI.

ALICE LISLE SHOWS "GREAT GOOD SENSE."

THEY began to go out a great deal into good county society, these Cleeves, who had dawned with a better light than it had known for a long, long time upon The Chase. Indeed, into what other than good county society could they have gone—considering that they came from a stock as old, and good, and proud as the best that can be found in that fair, smiling county, that is so well peopled with those in whose veins the blood runs blue.

Mrs. Cleeve abstained, much against her will, from these festive gatherings; but the father, as a matter of course, chaperoned his daughters; and people said how well they all behaved to the boy who had come in unexpectedly, and cut them out of the fair possessions on which they had been taught to count. The real state of Drummond Cleeve's finances, despite his precautions, were pretty well known in that neighbourhood, "where the name was so honoured" that scandal couldn't think of passing it over in silence; and they said that Drummond Cleeve would have hard work to keep his head above water when the term of his guardianship should expire—*unless*, in the meantime, one of his daughters made a *coup*.

People talked a good deal about the Alice Lisle affair, but no one had quite the correct version of the story; and, as the right of translation was rigorously reserved by Miss Cleeve, a properly revised edition of it never got abroad. But just enough of the truth did crop out to make the neighbourhood understand that it wouldn't be permitted to marry Sir Victor Cleeve while he was a minor.

No allusion to the projects that were filling Madge's brain had been made by either sister to the other since that night when Madge had destroyed all of the faith her sister had still had in her—and Charlie had wept over the broken toy. Madge had always before had great influence over her sister—influence, that is, in

those trifles which make up the life of young girls while they are under the paternal roof. On any point of conscience, or any matter of importance, Charlie had been wont, from the time the knowledge of the difference between right and wrong had dawned upon her, to assert herself; but in trifles—in matters of taste and dress—Madge had exercised an influence that was as unconsciously yielded to as exerted.

But now all this was changed. The shadow of a distrust that she could not allay rose up and separated them. Charlie conceived that sort of dread of and dislike almost to her sister which a knowledge that the object of it is possessed by some fixed, unalterable, impalpable plan is apt to engender. There was an end to free communion between them. In its place reigned coldness, mystery, and aversion. And this latter was stronger on Madge's side than on the younger sister's. Charlie pitied the perverted pride which was leading her sister on to—she knew not what. She pitied, and would, on the smallest recantation, have forgiven Madge; but Madge could not forgive Charlie for having elected to fight under a banner of her own, instead of warring for her (Madge's) idea.

And so the time passed on, and the boy-baronet grew less boylike day by day. He was a splendid type now of the old cavalier race from which he sprang—so debonair and gallant-looking, so graceful, handsome, and gay. He had merged suddenly into manhood, outwardly. The dawning moustache that was spoken of on his introduction, had become a brown, curled, well-established fact. And he no longer blushed when he addressed a woman, but looked rather as if he expected that the woman addressed by him should blush.

He was very full of honour and faith in the good that is in all human kind—loving and trustful in a magnificent kind of way that appeals invariably to the women's hearts around. He had spoken a good deal to Charlie about Alice Lisle, after the latter young lady's abrupt exit from Baysford society; spoken of her tenderly and honestly; and Charlie had always encouraged him to

speak of Alice in this way, and perhaps, in her heart of hearts, had not regretted that there was not a *souçon* of the hot passion of youth infused into his discourse respecting her.

"If Alice comes back, and I think she cares for me still, I shall propose to her; because she is a dear little thing, and I like her very much," he would say to Charlie. And Charlie would look him frankly in the face, and reply—

"And I think you'll do quite right, Victor, for she is a dear girl, and I mean to be very fond of her, and I mean her to be very fond of me; for *we* are like brother and sister already—ain't we?"

And Victor would say, "Yes," to this proposition, dubiously.

But, like the Knight of Toggenberg, "her heart was heavy; oh, heavy was her heart," as she gave this encouragement, and made these responses. She had sworn to make no sign of any other love than a sister might feel with honour for this boy, on whom they had come down, as she had said, like a troop of ravening wolves. She had sworn to make no such sign, and, if possible, feel no other love, and she could not be wholly true to her oath.

But she would be so partially. In vain was the truth daily made more manifest to her that she might, if she would, win him from all thoughts of every other love, to confess it for her. She would have prized it dearly, had she not been brought down to win this cousin of hers, if her sister could not, at any cost. She would have prized it highly, and gloried in it, and bent her own pride in glad acknowledgment that love was worthy to be the lord of all. But as it was, she put the thought away from her sternly, and as sternly checked aught beyond brotherly love from him. She would have none of it now—for she had been told to trick, and deceive for, and win it at any cost; in her scorn for the means they had sought to make her use, for the means her sister was using, Charlie deemed that the boy was worthy of a better, purer bride.

Mr. Lisle had prohibited intercourse with The Chase

people on his return from the Old Court, near Cambridge, where he had deposited his daughter. At least he had prohibited that kind of intercourse which Mrs. Lisle would have loved to indulge in, and which alone would be palatable to Alice when she came back. "I shall call there once a month," he said. "I do the same at every other house in the parish; and you'll call there when I do, my dear, and not at any other time."

"But it's not the sort of footing that I like to be upon with The Chase people, my love, whether *that* is to go no further with Sir Victor and Alice or not," she had protested after first meekly assenting. But Mr. Lisle was firm in this, that he would hold no other terms, consent to no other relations with The Chase than it behoved him as a clergyman to hold and entertain towards every one of his parishioners, no matter how lofty or lowly.

This tearing her away from him deepened for a time Alice's light hold on Sir Victor's heart. The coy damsel had almost confessed her love, and had then beat a retreat without sound of drum. He was quite resolved upon asking her to be his wife, but the resolve neither impaired his appetite for food, nor for anything that was attainable while she was away. He spoke very frankly of Alice to her mother on sundry occasions of meeting with that lady. He spoke of her very frankly by her Christian name, and said he should be glad to see her back again. But he did not bare his breast as entirely as Mrs. Lisle could have wished. He did not say enough to justify her in putting the pressure on and insisting upon Alice being recalled.

Only to his cousin Charlie did the young lover bare his breast. He sagely selected her as his confidant, and unfolded to her the programme he intended to observe when Miss Lisle should come home again tried in the fiery furnace of a separation, and proved true. And Charlie pressed a newly-developed thorn well into her heart, and smiled on the intentions that were so all she could desire them to be in their straightforwardness,

and honour, and honesty—pressed it well home and smiled, and made no sign.

In the meantime, pretty Alice Lisle was not running precisely the kind of career an absent lover would have been justified in desiring. She had gone down to Lisle Court in a low frame of mind, but still with a confident hope that Sir Victor would write to her in a few days—write to her such a letter as would entitle her to demand an immediate recall to Baysford. But days passed on and no such letter came; and then she took to the feminine course of making the best of things as they were.

There was no danger to the son of the house of Lisle in Alice's presence at the Court. The heir to that baronetcy was a gentleman of thirty, with very well, *i. e.*, firmly established, tastes and pleasures, and a habit of not giving them up or modifying them for anybody. He only visited the Court at rare intervals, and never remained at it long. Therefore, as I said before, there was no danger to be apprehended from Alice's presence, she not being a woman to startle a man into a sudden passion. And she was consequently free to remain as long as she or her father liked.

Mr. Lisle had given his cousins a brief *resumé* of the reasons which induced him to bring Alice away from Baysford. And Sir Bernard and Lady Lisle were good enough to applaud him highly for his prudence and parental discretion. The claims of a brother baronet to make a more brilliant alliance were acknowledged by Sir Bernard at once, and at the same time the claims of a younger branch of his own stock to be treated as something better than a toy, were felt.

"I think you did very wisely," the baronet said to his cousin; and Lady Lisle was good enough to add—

"Oh, very wisely indeed!—and so Alice will think in time, for I'm sure she has great good sense."

For the first few days of her residence at the Court, Alice, as I have said, wearied for the letter which should come and exalt her from the position of a love-sick young damsel, without reason, into that of a ditto with

a right. But the letter came not, for Victor was waiting to ask her verbally on her return, if she didn't stay too long and render him impatient to the point of writing. And after a period the edge of the wearying got blunted, and Alice began to evince some of that great good sense for which her cousin had given her credit.

Theodora, the eldest Miss Lisle, had married a man whose heart was in the Highlands during the grouse season, and in his harriers when at home. He divided that organ in fact so impartially between his gun and dogs that he had none left to bestow upon his wife. She being a sensible woman did not resent this inability : instead of sitting down and bewailing it, she turned it to the advantage of the neighbourhood by giving the whole of her time and attention to making her house pleasant.

The Oaks was the name of her husband's place, and it was within two miles of Cambridge—near enough for the laziest and most sought-after Cantabs to find Mrs. Burroughes's drawing room the best and most accessible *rendezvous*. "You'll find it much better fun at my house than you do with mamma," Theodora said to her cousin on the occasion of their first meeting ; "she never encourages festivity with its stays off, and I do, so I advise you to come and see me as often as you can."

And Alice was very glad to accept the frankly accorded invitation. Truth to tell, life at the Court, now Theodora was gone, was rather dull—grandly so, but *dull* nevertheless. The only remaining Miss Lisle was sedulously kept from the gaze of the unholy, being only sixteen and a great beauty. "Don't let any of those beasts of boys get about Ida," her brother had said when she appeared before him in a long dress for the first time ; "and bring her out next year at the first drawing-room—she'll walk over the course if you're careful." And Lady Lisle had taken her son's words to heart, and felt them to be good and worthy of being followed. Therefore was life at the Court dull, and Ida sedulously kept from profane eyes.

"As Theodora's good enough to ask you, you may go

whenever you feel inclined, my dear," Lady Lisle said to Alice. "Ida does not go much to her sister's house, unless her sister promises me beforehand to see *no one*—which she's never willing to promise. But it's different with you—and you may go when you like."

By which permission Lady Lisle meant Alice to understand, that the slighted and condemned morsels which were disdained for Ida, would be rather a succulent diet for her (Alice) upon which, if it so pleased her, she would be free to feed. No number of boys buzzing around her could detract from her position, seeing it did not exist. And Alice, when she had ceased to weary freshly for her letter, was grateful for the permission, and did not care about the lack of appreciation which it evidenced.

Theodora had the knack of making her house thoroughly agreeable. People not only liked dining and dancing, and staying—but they also, extraordinary as it may appear, liked calling there.

She had plenty of *bonhomie*, and she did not permit men to make love to her when unemployed girls were by; therefore the women liked her. And she did permit a certain amount of worship at other times to be offered at her shrine by the youth of her acquaintance; therefore the men liked her. And she left a wide margin, despite her daring, between the path she elected to follow and the brink of impropriety; therefore no one could say anything against her.

But though she left this margin, hers was not a rigorous house; not by any means the sort of house in which an aspirant for a young lady's hand would like that young lady to take her first degree in society. Not, in fact, the house that a man would desire his unsophisticated love to graduate in, unprotected by his presence.

It was all blameless enough, but the heart of the host was never at home, and his body but rarely; and men lounged about in the room for hours, and tried to sit one another out, and read Owen Meredith's refreshingly cool verses at the feet of the mistress of the mansion; and

when such things as these are done, the house cannot be called rigorous.

But Alice found it all remarkably pleasant, for Theodora was no monopolizer.

"I have them all here because I'm a married woman, and can't fall in love with any of them, but don't you lose your heart to a wrong man, Alice," she said, after Alice's first introduction to the *habitués* of The Oaks. "Avoid extreme youth, or you will have stern guardians and parents interfering, besides running the risk of the gentleman changing his mind directly you're out of his sight."

"I'm not likely to fall in love with any of them, Theodora," Alice replied.

"Oh! are you not? Well, I'm glad of it, for you'll amuse yourself much more. But if you should eventually fall into the weakness, don't let it be with a wrong man. Mamma would tell you that they are all wrong men whom you meet at my house, but I take leave to hold a different opinion. However, I'm very glad to see you, my dear, and come again as soon as you can."

The pretty Devonshire girl with the peachy face and full, soft figure, did not attract extreme youth as did the married woman whose *mignonne* charms were set off by an air. The latter had more "go" about her; she was a fast, well-bred woman, from whose lips a few words of slang would now and then fall, without seeming vulgar. They turned from Alice, from whose lips *repartée* did not flow easily, to Mrs. Burroughes, who was never at a loss for something to say that sounded well, no matter how meagre the matter, from her manner of saying it.

But though Alice was powerless to win the band of boys from the adoration of the lady who let them all adore her, and kept them in order through never forgetting, herself, that she was a married woman, and so not liable to fall in love with any of them, those long hours were never tiresome to her that she passed in her cousin's house. A Mr. James was staying at The Oaks until he could complete the purchase of an estate in the neighbourhood—a fine estate, with a fine house upon it—that was passing, through stress of circumstances, out

of the hands of the old family who had owned it for centuries, and into those of Mr. James, a gentlemanly young man, with a large fortune which had been made by his papa over the counter of a great London shop.

He was anxious to bring his gold into the country and subject it to every refining process available. He was not pretentious, and he was not a snob, but he did wish to mingle on terms of equality with those whom his education and habits entitled him to mingle freely with—the "best" people in the county. The Burroughes's had already welcomed him warmly amongst them, but the Lisles had held aloof.

"If you were married they would be friendly enough with you," Mrs. Burroughes told him; "but they're so afraid of Ida."

Now, Mr. James was a handsome man, therefore the fear was not utterly unreasonable, and he respected it accordingly, and looked forward to the time when the Lisles should notice him, without indignation filling his soul at the notice being withheld for the present.

And while affairs were in this state, Alice came over from Baysford, and here at The Oaks he saw her, and saw that she was pretty, and reflected that she was a Lisle.

He was a handsome man, and an older man than Sir Victor Cleeve, and he was more devotional in his manner to her, and he was rich, and a free agent, and—she was "only a woman."

Well! she soon ceased to weary for the letter that didn't come; and she remembered that life at the Baysford Rectory without a prospect of exchanging it for one at The Chase was a slow thing. She remembered this, and he reflected that she was a Lisle! Result was, he proposed, and she accepted him.

It was not all—this important matter—completed in the haste which my cursory manner of mentioning it might imply. Alice was rather staggered when he asked her to marry him, and seemed to take it for granted that she would do so.

"I must speak to Theodora first," she said; and he

told her that "Mrs. Burroughes had wished him well through it all."

"Well, then I'd better—what had I better do?" she added naïvely, and he told her that he would take the onus of "speaking about it" to anybody off her hands, if she'd only tell him that she loved him!

And Alice, to avoid trouble perhaps, in a measure, and a little because life in the Devonshire parsonage was so *very* dull, said yes, she did love him.

"It is a capital match for you—and an excessively good connexion for him, my dear," Lady Lisle said, when Alice told her about it. "You have shown the greatest good sense, Alice, and I shall write to your father at once, and tell him how heartily I commend the marriage. We'll ask Mr. James to dinner."

"I think Mr. James means to write to papa himself—thank you," Alice replied timidly.

"Oh! that of course—but your father will view it very differently if seen through the medium of our approval. I really am very much pleased; very much pleased indeed; for though the benefit to Mr. James of being connected with us, even so remotely, will be immense, still it's an excellent match for you, my child, and one that I am very much pleased with Theodora for having brought about."

All this was very kind, not sympathetic, perhaps, and rather worldly and patronising, but still very kind.

The promise of writing to her papa and putting the affair in a pleasant light before him, and the prospect of Mr. James being asked to dinner at Lisle Court as her lover, her own property! all this was very soothing to the feelings which had been sorely ruffled away in that Devonshire village, because a young baronet had carried her basket for her. And his care-takers had then given her to understand that he was forbidden fruit. Lady Lisle's grand acquiescence in the fresh scheme was very soothing, but more soothing still were Theodora's congratulations.

"You're a brick of a girl to have bagged the best bird put up for you, Alice," she said; and between us, when

you're settled at Royston Hall, we'll keep the neighbourhood from stagnating. Encourage a love of field sports in your husband—you'll have more time to make your house pleasant."

CHAPTER XII.

MORE OF MADGE'S ADVICE.

GOLDEN October and foggy November had worn themselves away while these events were taking place, and the puddings and plans were mixed and formed for the spending of Christmas as Christmas ought to be spent. And still Sir Victor Cleeve held to his resolution of asking Alice to be his wife when she returned, and still unconscious Alice remained away.

"I shall go down to the Lisles and hear when Alice is coming back," he said one day to Charlie. "A fellow can't go on like this for ever, and they've cut us, so that it's no use waiting for them to come to The Chase, is it?"

"None in the least; and I think you're quite right to find out about Alice, Victor; it will be all right when she does come, but while she's away, poor girl, I dare say she's miserable enough. She's a much better girl, and a much more patient girl, than I should have been. No one would have packed me off and kept my sentiments hermetically sealed up from the man I loved in the way they have hers."

"Ah! she's tamer than you are; but I don't know about her being better: by Jove! I don't indeed," Sir Victor rejoined. "However, I shall go down to the Lisles and hear when she is coming back."

When a boy at school, Victor had always kept his word "like a gentleman;" his mother had taught him this grand principle practically. She had suffered so herself, poor thing, through her husband's incapability of keeping his word and vow, that she had instilled into her boy that to do so was a very good and true sign of being that which he always aspired to be, a gentleman. The clasp-

knives that he promised were always forthcoming, and the marbles that he hinted they should have, they always had; and though he abominated lessons, if he said he would learn them, they were invariably learnt. He was not the man, therefore, to forget that he had given the word of promise to Alice Lisle's heart, if he had not yet to her ear. The full complement of clasp-knives and marbles that had been suggested to her should be given.

He went down on this dark December day with the usual troop of dogs at his heels, and the popular air of the period on his tongue. I am sorry to say that the consciousness of the rectitude of his intentions did not make an atmosphere of sunshine around him. Though he trolled forth the assertion that he could be happy in a second floor for evermore with Nancy, he did feel that the odds were in favour of mediocre bliss having a very good place in the field of his life if he married Alice Lisle. And when one is not quite twenty years of age, life seems long, and mediocre bliss an undesirable thing.

But his purpose never wavered. He felt that she had expected this offer, and that it behoved him as a gentleman, despite the scowls of his guardian, to make it.

"And poor little darling, I dare say she's suffered enough, as Charlie says—but still she might have come," he said to himself, as he sat in the Rectory drawing-room where he had not been since the day he had carried the basket, the day he had whispered to Alice that he would come again the next. And scarcely had he thought this, when to him entered Mrs. Lisle.

"I'm sure I didn't expect to see *you* here after such a long time," she said, when they had shaken hands.

And Victor replied—

"Why not? I've come to ask about Alice; when is she coming home? If she isn't coming soon, I must write to her, Mrs. Lisle, but I had rather have seen her first again."

He said it out in a straightforward manly way, without any confusion or blushing. The only thing that was boyish about it, in fact, was its extreme candour.

"We have heard from Alice to-day," Mrs. Lisle replied: "but before I tell you about Alice, I must ask

you if you know how Mr. Cleeve, your guardian, behaved before she went away."

And on Victor replying in the negative, she told him the whole story—the story of the interference with his first love dream—the story of how he had been arranged for like a child, and put out of court in the affair altogether, and treated as if his tastes and feelings and desires were nought.

"He said decidedly that he shouldn't allow any such *absurdity*, so there was nothing for us to do but to send Alice away—as we did," she wound up with.

And then Sir Victor Cleeve burst forth into a torrent of wrath against his guardian that was very refreshing to Alice Lisle's mamma.

"You should have told me this—it was cruel to her not to tell it to me before," he said. "I should have said then what I've come to say now, that I'll marry her directly I'm of age, if she'll have me."

"Perhaps you had better write, and I will write as well, to Alice before we say anything to her father," she said at last. But Sir Victor said, "No, there should be no further fault on his side; he would like to see her father at once. And then I shall go back and tell my guardian what I have done," he added; "and there'll be an end to this. I shall feel like a sneak till I have spoken to Mr. Lisle."

He was evidently a young man who would gang his own gait, and Mrs. Lisle could only pray that her husband would be worldly-wise for once in his life.

"Mr. Lisle shall come in here and see you," she said, for she had a mind to be present at the interview, and she felt that she occupied a more commanding position in her own than in her husband's special room.

"My dear, he has come to offer to Alice!" she whispered to Mr. Lisle, as he was crossing the hall.

"You should have spared him that by telling him about Alice at once," he answered. And then Mrs. Lisle knew that she must kill the newly-born hope of seeing Alice at The Chase without loss of time.

"I am convinced that you meant honourably," Mr.

Lisle said, laying his hand on the young baronet's shoulder; "in fact, I never doubted it for a moment. But you must not write and tell Alice so now, for she has just entered into an engagement to which I have given my full consent and approval. It won't be a brilliant marriage like one with you would have been, but she has promised to make it, and I have decided in favour of it. There can be no appeal against that decision."

"I suppose you are quite right, sir; but all the same I think I have been badly treated in this affair," Victor said, when he had heard as much as it was necessary he should hear.

"Oh! I don't know; the marriage would have been provocative of much annoyance to you, with all your family so decidedly set against it," Mr. Lisle rejoined. "I never could have given my consent after what Mr. Cleeve said, while he remained at The Chase."

And then Victor's brow grew flushed, and he said that Mr. Cleeve would have been powerless to prevent it, if Alice herself had been—and then he paused, for he did not like to say he thought her inconstant before her parents.

"Will you let her know that I was in earnest? Will you tell her what I came down here to say to-day?" he asked, when he was taking leave. And Mr. Lisle replied—

"Well, to tell the truth, I think I had better not, Sir Victor. Alice is happy enough now, but how she might be if it came to her knowledge that she might have had you if she had waited a few days longer, I do not know. Mr. James is an exceedingly nice young man, my cousins tell me, but no very strong affection can have grown up in Alice's heart for him as yet. I think I had rather not tell what you came to say to-day, and I trust to your honour to keep it from her."

He felt that he could trust to Sir Victor's honour, as the young man shook his hand and went his way, telling the father of the girl, who might waver if tested, that he might rely upon him not to test her. Sir Victor was outraged at the idea of the domineering tactics that had

been brought to bear upon him, but even in the first moments, in the earliest pangs of his disappointment, he knew himself to be far from inconsolable.

"I think Alice should have been told about it," Mrs. Lisle said, when he was gone. "Such an offer as that to be kept from her! I don't call it fair—indeed I don't."

"You were delighted with the prospect of the marriage your daughter is going to make till half an hour since," Mr. Lisle rejoined. "Why should you wish now to unsettle her mind? No good could come of it, and where harm might possibly ensue from speaking, silence is the better part. If you had kept silence about Mr. Cleeve's visit here, I should have been better pleased. You have only set the young man against his guardian for nothing. I must insist on more discretion being observed with regard to Alice. I'm not going to have a child of mine jilt a man, or tempted to do so."

Sir Victor Cleeve walked home quickly, determined, while his rage was young, upon giving his guardian to understand that his guardianship must be restricted from all further interference with the heart of his ward. Anger at the way he had been made to lose her almost entirely put his sorrow for the loss of Alice Lisle out of his mind. "What a rage Charlie will be in with her father when I tell her about it!" he thought. "Ah! if Alice had had her spirit, they wouldn't have got her to fall in love with any one else in a hurry." And then the notion of "getting a girl to fall in love" against her will struck him as the absurd thing it was, and he burst out laughing.

He went in, and found confusion reigning at The Chase. And then he abstained from seeking his guardian's presence in anger, for the prayer Drummond Cleeve had breathed when he married his second wife was just fulfilled, and he was the father of a son.

But to Charlie he told the whole story, and her wrath against her father was as hearty as even he could desire.

"I can only hope that he did it because he thought you didn't care much for Alice, and might not have been happy with her after all," she said.

And he replied, "Ah! well I hope he wont go

judging for me another time, when I care for somebody more than I did for Alice Lisle. When you consider that after another year whatever I do is no concern of any one's, it's rather hard that the peace of my whole life is to be sacrificed to my guardian's love of exercising the petty power that is invested in his hands for just that year, isn't it?"

And Charlie almost sighed as she answered—

"Oh, I wish for your sake that the year was gone, Victor, and that we were gone too!"

But for all his wrath being still young, he could not endorse the last sentiment.

"Nonsense, Charlie! Though I don't care to have that sort of thing tried on upon me—no fellow would like it I should rather think—still the best part of *The Chase* will be gone when you leave it."

The youngest scion of the house of Cleeve was made a Christian on Christmas-day; and Madge, with her cousin's co-operation, had organized such a festivity to celebrate the double event as gladdened the pride of her father, but saddened his heart in that it was not the heir to the title whose baptism was rejoiced at.

"I don't see the good of it," Mr. Cleeve had said, when the scheme had been first unfolded to him. "A ball in honour of the advent of such a mistake as this boy is, now I have nothing to leave him, seems an anomaly."

"Oh! but, papa, let it come off—do," Madge had urged. "Just consider! we must put Victor in a good temper, and give him plenty of amusement, in order to put the last remnant of his affection for Miss Lisle out of his head. She is to be married from Lisle Court, I hear, and she'll come over here as a bride. We can't prevent his seeing her—it will be better, therefore, to give her to him freely, well mixed with others."

"Well, do as you like, Madge—only remember he is a susceptible boy, and you can't give a ball without bringing pretty women under his notice."

"There will be none prettier than Charlie," she said, lifting her eyes to his face and gazing at him steadily.

And he shook his head as he returned that steady gaze, and said—

“Or than yourself, child; but you mustn't mind it if he does find Charlie the fairer of the two.”

Mr. and Mrs. Lisle left Baysford for Cambridgeshire on the 6th of December, and on the 7th pretty Alice became Mrs. Selwyn James. Sir Victor told himself that he ought to avoid hilarity of any sort on the day that witnessed the final and complete demolition of his first chateau d'Espagne; but Madge overthrew his gloomily good intentions by getting him out for a sharp trot through the frosty air with her, and descanting freely on the many legitimate opportunities for gaiety the visit of the bride to the home of her childhood would give rise to.

“It seems a queer idea,” he said at last, “to be talking about asking her and her husband to dinner, when only a day or two since I was thinking about her as my future wife. It has been a precious hasty affair.”

“Rather indelicately so,” Miss Cleeve said coolly. “I presume the old Lisles were afraid Mr. James would change his mind. However, I'm very glad that she is marrying so well. Let me give you a hint, dear Victor, now we are on the topic—and don't betray me! When you fall in love again don't take Charlie into your confidence.”

“Why, you were the one that objected to Alice Lisle, Madge; Charlie always advised me to—to—go in and win.”

“Ah! yes, openly—just as I censured openly. Well, I can't say any more, and you're daft if you can't take a hint and act on what I've said already. Charlie is a very clever young lady, Victor—a very clever young lady indeed; she will never say anything that can run counter to your wishes, while I constantly like offending you because—I love you so.”

She turned her brilliant grey eyes, softened now by the tender love-light, full upon him as she spoke, and his pulse beat quicker, and his eyes looked straight into hers. She was very beautiful, and she was beginning to act upon him like wine.

"Oh! Madge," he began, and then a quick passionate sigh rose up and choked his utterance for a moment. "Oh! Madge, don't make me doubt Charlie—for I love you both so much."

"Don't doubt her, dear, at my instigation," she whispered softly through the keen, bright air: "but don't let her deceive you, Victor."

It was the not unfrequent recurrence of moments such as these that gave Madge courage to hope on. Use—the constant sight of her—the knowledge that she was always in his home—blunted the young man in a measure to her beauty and fascination. If he had been compelled to go out and seek her—to take trouble to gain her society—he would have gone and sought that society with avidity, and long before this have been madly in love with her. But custom blunted him, and it was only in moments such as these, when she laid herself out with an impassioned determination to excite him, that she could succeed in calling forth these sparks of more than fraternal love.

"We must not pall upon him," she would say to her father. "Let him go away even for a time, into men's society entirely, if possible, and he will see us differently when he returns. There will be no danger in his going away into a *coterie* of fast men, if you know of any such, papa—the faster the better."

Drummond Cleeve had ceased to be particular about many things, but it jarred upon him to hear his daughter speak thus. He frowned and fidgeted, but he held his peace, for he remembered that his lines would not be drawn in pleasant places if Miss Cleeve failed in fulfilling the oath she had taken.

"I don't know any men that I could trust him with," he said; "he'd bore most of the men I know, and their youngest daughters would marry him. I don't know where I can send him for a change."

"If he went away for a month somewhere or other where he would be entirely thrown with men, he would understand the real state of the case, and know that he was in love with me the moment he returns," Madge

thought ; "but while he's with me every day he will never find it out."

Her purpose possessed her entirely. Every thought and feeling was directed towards its furtherance. She *must marry him*, she told herself, not alone because she loved him with a hot love her reason was powerless to control, but because she had sworn to do so for the good of her family. She must marry him, and he didn't seem to see the necessity for it, and it behoved her to leave nothing undone which would lead him into those paths from whence the correct view would be taken. Her purpose, her firm-set, inflexible, unalterable purpose, paled her, and wore her out nearly. Her brilliancy was a feverish brilliancy now ; and bright as her beauty was, she thought it would not snare him unless it was withdrawn from his gaze for a time. "He must go away," she said ; and though Victor at the time had not the most remote intention of so doing, his going away was a thing that was as sure as fate, for Madge willed it.

The bride and bridegroom came to Baysford a few days before the ball at The Chase, and the Cleeves called upon them, and they promised to grace the ball. Alice paraded her husband about with much unction, and as she was very pretty and loving, he liked being so paraded very well indeed. Maternal pride burst all bonds when the Selwyn James's had been at the Rectory a day or two. Mrs. Lisle liked her son-in-law, and was well pleased with the wealthy, happy, thoroughly good, comfortable match, her daughter had made. But she also felt it to be well that her son-in-law should understand that he was not the only sportsman who had aimed at this plump bird he had bagged so easily. She had promised Mr. Lisle to say nothing to Alice about Sir Victor Cleeve's offer, but she had not promised to be equally reticent with regard to Alice's husband ; indeed she told herself that it was due to Alice that he should know.

"If you hadn't spoken when you did, Mr. James—and it just shows how right it is that young men should not shilly-shally when they want a girl—we should have had Alice up at The Chase. Have I mentioned it to you before ?"

"No," Mr. James told her, it was the first he had heard of it.

"Ah, well, I assure you I'm very glad that things are as they are; you're older, you see, and have more stability, and, in fact, Alice is a very fortunate girl, and I'm delighted with her fortune; but it isn't every mother would tell you so, if a rich young baronet had been to her begging and praying for her daughter's hand. Poor young man, he felt it terribly when we told him that Alice was engaged to you."

"H'm! I suppose he's got over it, hasn't he, as we're asked there to this ball? Well, he's a nice young fellow; we met him just now, and he asked me to go coursing with him this morning, when he found I'd brought the horses. I couldn't go, but I liked the young fellow. What a lark about Alice! of course his guardian wouldn't hear of it?"

Mr. James said it all frankly and pleasantly. He quite understood that though the Lisle stock was a grand one in Cambridgeshire—an offshoot was as nothing in Devonshire; he loved his wife and he appreciated her—but he was not going blindly to believe that she might have married Sir Victor Cleeve without opposition, if he himself had not gained her promise before.

"I don't think he would have allowed his guardian to dictate to him about it," Mrs. Lisle said coldly; she wanted to make her son-in-law feel reverentially as well as affectionately towards his wife, who might have been a baronet's wife, but for him.

"I don't think any one would have had a word to say in the matter but just their two selves," she continued. "However, as I told you, *I'm* very well pleased that things are as they are, and I have never told Alice a word about Sir Victor's proposal."

"I think Alice might as well know it, Mrs. Lisle," the young husband replied. "I'm not afraid of my wife knowing that another man loved her—she's a different girl to what I take her for if such knowledge will affect her in any way. I should not like to have it affect her."

So Alice, before she went to the ball at The Chase,

learnt that Sir Victor had been quite serious in his intentions. Alice was young, very young!—Would there was no age between ten and three-and-twenty!

CHAPTER XIII.

MRS. SELWYN JAMES DEVELOPES A TALENT FOR WHICH
HER HUSBAND "HAD NOT GIVEN HER CREDIT."

A YOUNGER brother of Mr. James arrived at Baysford on Christmas-eve. He was a captain in the —th Foot, quartered at Aldershot at present. The Lisles had seen him at his brother's wedding, and had liked him, and given him a hearty marginal invitation to come and visit them in the quiet west-country village whenever he pleased. It pleased him to go and spend Christmas with them, when he found that his brother and his bride were there. And it pleased them all that he had come, for he was brimming over with animal spirits, that not even the reflection of its being the orthodox thing to be so brimming over at that season of the year could subdue.

Conway James was a good-looking, gentlemanly young fellow. The family gold (though a younger son, his share of it was large) that had been made over a counter, flowed very gracefully through his hands. All thoughts of the shop vanished from the minds of men when they were in his presence. His chambers in Duke Street were the rendezvous, when he was in town, for the best of the Bohemians—and not only for the best of the Bohemians, but for those who had forsworn that engaging and anti-respectable nationality, and turned into literary and artistic "swells," as those who were still addicted to the pursuits they had forsworn designated them. He was in the line, but for all that, Guardsmen gave him the hand of good-fellowship, and graciously came and practised in his room those marches, and fantasias, and overtures with which, when perfected, the "Rambling Ragamuffins," as the amateur band called themselves,

were wont to soothe the savage breast in the best drawing rooms in London. His walls were hung with the paintings of his artist friends, of whom he would buy at any price. His book-shelves abounded with presentation volumes. He was in the very best, *i. e.* the most brilliant and intellectual male society in London. And there he remained!

Into the holiest of holies, into the very heart of the best society of our many-circled great metropolis, he could not penetrate. For gentle woman stands at the gate, guarding the entrance, and she is more exacting in her conditions as to the credentials that may admit, than the Peri found the warder of the gates of Paradise. He was in the most brilliant and intellectual male society in London, and his rooms were the favourite rendezvous of this society! But the men he knew went where he could not go—they remembered how the gold had been gained which supplied the luxury they were in the habit of benefitting by—and one and all they spoke of his position as an anomaly, and abstained from introducing Conway James to the more immediate notice of their own and other men's wives.

But though his wings were clipped, he had the trick of flight, as far as he could soar, of the best. Though he could not be permitted free access to the most sacred regions, he had a thorough knowledge of the manners and customs of the gods, and to the imagination of the younger men in his own regiment especially, he was an awful swell.

He knew well how far his wealth and good looks and position as an officer would carry him; and he cheerfully accepted the fact, that at a certain point these things become futile. The situation was not so bad but what he could, without any peculiar exercise of the virtue of contentment, make the best of it. He did make the best of it, in such a way that he gave men the impression of being overflowing with good feeling towards fate for having placed him where she had. "Which again," they observed, "showed a certain obtuseness in a man whose father had sold yards of ribbon, and with the

adroitness that only comes of a life-long practice, avoided pricking his fingers with the little pins.

Captain Conway James was taken to the ball at The Chase. Alice had an intense feeling of satisfaction in making her entrance, accompanied by these two handsome men, before the younger man who had been in love with her, and who had wanted to marry her. She blushed beautifully when Sir Victor welcomed her and asked her for the first galop. Blushed brilliantly and happily, for she had so many sources of pride! She was married to a rich, good-looking man—she was exquisitely dressed—she was a bride, and every one would look at her—her host was probably in love with her still—the man with the longest auburn whiskers in the room was on terms of fraternal intercourse with her, and yet was enough of a stranger for an element of excitement to be infused into the said intercourse! All these were sources of the purest, the most perfect and unalloyed joy and gratification and pride to pretty Mrs. Selwyn James. She fluttered ecstatically as she introduced “My brother, Captain Conway James,” to Miss Cleve and Sir Victor, and apologized for bringing him without an invitation in tones that showed them plainly what a treat she thought she was giving them in having brought him at all. And then she sailed off gloriously on her husband’s arm, her lace flounces billowing around her, to a seat on the Dowagers’ divan, over such a large portion of which her rich robes surged, that the women directly felt aggressive towards her, and prepared to declare that she “went on too much to look well with that young man, her husband’s brother.”

There were plenty of pretty girls in the room. Devonshire was not disgraced by the show of beauty at this first ball at The Chase. Rachel (the amiable lady who is desirous of rendering her customers beautiful for ever, not the *tragédienne*, is alluded to here) would have torn her hair in wild despair of ever tinting the cheek with the exquisite hue the soft, limpid atmosphere of that western county keeps clear and bright. They came to the charge—to the conquest of the young Sir Victor

—a perfect army of bright-eyed, peechy-cheeked dewy-mouthed girls—white, plump, and soft, and deliciously feminine. And Madge, standing at the door to receive and welcome, and make the honours, smiled with gracious condescension on the long array of fair women that passed her—and had no fear.

And she had less when the military band lent by the colonel of the regiment quartered at Exeter rang out inspiring waltzes and galops, and the army of beauty plunged round the room. The feet of the west are not the feet for the purpose; they are adapted for going over heavy ground. "They go as if they'd no length of pastern," Captain Conway James said to Madge, as he put his arm round her waist for the fifth time, and went off down the length of the room without breaking the line.

"Did you ever see so many pretty girls in your life before?" she asked, and then he made her do the back-steps, in order that he might answer her without puffing.

"No; I don't think I ever did; there's one especially—a girl with golden hair, that's uncommonly pretty."

"I think you mean my sister; she's the only girl in the room with bright yellow hair; haven't you been introduced to her?"

"No, I have not: is she your sister? Look! she's dancing now with Sir Victor Cleeve."

And Madge stopped and looked at the pair that floated by.

"She dances very nicely," Captain James said, critically; "but I like your dancing best after all—you're as straight as a dart the whole time. Shall we go on?"

He put his arm round her again, and they went off at a terrific pace. Still, though the pace was terrific, she could feel that ever and anon his eyes were bent upon her admiringly, and at first this feeling gave rise to one of repugnance (when a woman is in love with one man, the admiration of another is one of the agonies of Tantalus); but at last this merged into a desire to turn him to account.

She resolved to fan this young soldier's liking and

admiration for her into something else, in order that he might come to think it a delightful arrangement that Sir Victor and himself should be much together. "Intimacy with Victor, he will naturally think, will bring about intimacy with me," she thought; "and Aldershott, according to his account, would be a deliciously dull place for Victor to go and find out my value in."

"Shall you be long at Aldershott?" she asked.

"Only two months more, thank the Lord; it's very poor fun, this playing at camping out, I assure you, Miss Cleeve."

"You have little amusement—little society?"

"None at all—positively none!" he replied.

"Then Victor goes there!" was her inmost thought; "though to lose his presence is to lose the light of my life, the salt that gives a savour to everything."

And a cloud came over her spirit, and darkened her brow, as she thought of how long the time would be to her, that it was still essential to her that he should pass away from home! How dreary it would be to come down to breakfast, and know that the warm, firm clasp that would lighten the whole weight of whatever might be upon her, would not be given to her hand—that hand that always went forth with such hardly-restrained passionate eagerness to meet his. "My God! I could not live without him," she thought, as she stood leaning on her partner's arm, and watching Victor. "I couldn't *live*, if I thought he'd never love me. I couldn't live, if I didn't think he'd give me the words and the caresses I'd give my soul to gain. He can't be dead and cold for long to such love as I would give him! he *can't*, if the blood in his veins isn't water! I'd kneel at his feet and pray for it, if that would gain it from him. I'd lie down, and let him trample on my neck, if he'd love me afterwards; heaven would be no heaven to me without him. And this earth will be a hell to me, if he seeks another woman's love!" And at this juncture the band struck up again, and she had to fly off "straight and fleet as a dart," to the almost glittering strains of the "Burlesque."

In the meantime, Sir Victor Cleeve had been doing

his best to please everybody, and failing, despite his earnest endeavours, through showing that "everybody" did not please him. He tried to circulate freely, and he constantly found himself stagnating, as it were, near to Charlie.

"You didn't give this affair in order that we might talk to each other, Victor," she said to him at last. "If that had been your sole object, we might have fulfilled it better by remaining alone."

"I quite understand, Charlie, this affair, as you call it, was given to celebrate the christening of the young heathen, your brother."

"And a little in honour of the bride; and, perhaps, a tiny bit that you might have an opportunity of improving your acquaintance with these young Devonshire ladies," she said gently.

"Ah! the bride!" he rejoined, laughing; "doesn't she look nice? she always did that, I thought; but unlike herself someway."

"I haven't noticed that," Charlie replied; "I think Mrs. Selwyn James very pretty—so I always thought Miss Alice Lisle."

"I haven't talked to her much yet," he said; "but somehow or other, I find there's a difference in her."

When Charlie Cleeve glanced towards the bride again, some little time had elapsed since Victor had remarked on the difference there was in her present and previous demeanour. During the interval, Sir Victor had conveyed himself to the bride's side, and Charlie, as she glanced, marked the difference clearly.

The unsophisticated Alice of former days had waxed decidedly coquettish; her cousin Theodora's manner was a broadly marked and easily imitated one; but an innate something always refined it. Alice had caught the salient points of the manner; she had put in the brilliant bits of colour, the intense blue and vivid scarlet, and she had essayed and succeeded as far as colour and general effect went in painting up to that pitch which had seemed so striking to her. But she failed in the delicate, almost imperceptible gradations of colouring, which toned and

softened down the whole thing she imitated. In a word, she coquetted on the plan of Mrs. Burroughes, but, like a novice, she out-heroded Herod—she coquetted aggressively.

Her slight want of self-possession and her utter want of skill made her go to greater lengths than in the innocence of her heart she dreamt of going. This young bride of three weeks, who really loved her husband, made him feel both jealous and ashamed of her, on this first occasion of their being in public together. A more adroit and experienced woman, a more determined heartless flirt, a more unscrupulous wife, would have marked the cloud that lowered on his brow, and dispelled it, for the sake of dispelling the doubts that caused it to arise. But Alice marked the cloud, and pouted like the unsophisticated girl she was; and felt indignant that Selwyn should be annoyed at her doing what a fashionable woman like Theodora was free to do without marital interference.



CHAPTER XIV

A DIFFICULT GAME TO PLAY.

MR. JAMES was not a man to make a fuss when a fuss could be avoided. He marked his young wife's manner, and disapproved of it, and determined on making her acquainted with his disapproval when they should be alone together—determined on telling her frankly that neither affected sentimentalism nor daring gallantry displayed towards and accepted by her would find favour in his eyes.

"Mrs. Burroughes's example was not the best in the world for a young girl like Alice," he thought, as he looked on, and witnessed his pretty wife giving a bad imitation—bad, because exaggerated, of a phase of manner that Mrs. Burroughes was rather in the habit of displaying towards young men, a manner composed of equal portions of familiarity and fascination.

"She hasn't her cousin's knack of keeping them from going too far; and, by Jove! though I ain't jealous, I won't stand it," he thought, as Sir Victor Cleeve came up, and Alice, the bride, the cynosure of all eyes, laid her hand on his arm, and "came a great deal" of the friendly confidential familiarity of the "married woman" and old friend to him.

Sir Victor Cleeve would as soon have stolen the spoons as have stolen a glance or a word from another man's wife that that other man would not have willingly seen given to him. But he was young and impulsive, and rather addicted to doing what was pleasant at the moment, without giving much thought as to whether the results of that thing would be pleasant in the future or not.

The glove had been withdrawn from her left hand by Mrs. Selwyn James, and the white plump fingers were laid confidently on his arm; and though the wedding ring, the mystic circlet, was there, he could not see it, for hoops of diamonds and opals concealed it. He looked down upon the gem-covered hand, and she looked up in his face, and smiled, and blushed.

Mrs. Selwyn James remembered how her dashing cousin Theodora was wont to fraternise, to ride, and waltz with, and order about generally, the best-looking men around her, and to defend all these proceedings by declaring that she was a married woman, and might do as she liked so long as she did nothing unconventional, let alone wrong. She wished that Sir Victor would lead her away now from the immediate vicinity of the man she was so proud of having married, in order that she might try her hand at the game Theodora played so skilfully and innocuously. But he showed no inclination to do anything of the sort, and seemed to prefer standing by and talking to her husband as well as herself.

At last, ever so gently and discreetly, she did contrive to indicate that she would like to walk along the sides of the room. Mr. James had turned to answer the questions of an excruciatingly-eager-for-information lady behind him, and when he looked back again at the spot his wife had occupied, lo, the bird had fled.

He could see her leaning on the arm of her host, moving slowly along the floor, with her face upturned and her head thrown back in a little affected way that was new to her. And he stood with his arms folded, gazing rather sternly after his young bride, who might (her mother said) have been married to the young baronet but for him.

There was nothing in what the pair he watched said to one another that was deserving of sternness. She found when she moved off alone with him that the game that looked so easy in Theodora's hands was a difficult one to commence. She had no sentiment remaining about Sir Victor Cleeve, but she rather wished that Sir Victor would betray some remains of sentiment for her—and he did not appear at all desirous of doing so.

"I didn't think, when I saw you last, that so much would have happened before I saw you again," she said, after a few minutes. The game *was* a difficult one to play, and she made her first move awkwardly.

"What has happened since?" he asked. "You don't mean about my throwing my bay mare down, and wringing her shoulder, do you?" And then Alice remembered that her sentimental allusion was imperfect. Sir Victor was taking her literally: she had seen him last two days before the ball.

"No, I didn't mean that; I meant all that has happened since that last day you walked with me. Don't you remember?"

"Of course I do," he answered, gently. "I spoilt the dinners that you were carrying to the people. Ah, yes! a good deal has happened since then; but I suppose we had better not talk about it, had we? How's Pickle?"

"I'm sure I don't know anything about Pickle," she said. She was rather cross at the failure of her first innocent attempt to get up one of those harmless little excitements which threw a colouring of interest over Theodora's career. "I'm sure I don't know anything about Pickle. Mr. James is having a most beautiful thorough-bred horse broken on purpose for me. Here comes Conway with your cousin: isn't he handsome?"

The cousin cast a keen, observant glance over the pair as she approached them—over the gallant young host and the bride, his lost love. And then the bride made one more effort to play the difficult game. She wanted to show Miss Cleeve that she still could sway Sir Victor's heart.

"How glad your cousin must be that I am married," she said, pathetically. "They were so angry—oh, so dreadfully angry!—when they thought you might like me."

He gave her hand a pressure—it was almost involuntary—as it rested on his arm; but he was firm in saying nothing that her husband might not hear.

"I find I must take you back and deposit you, Mrs. James," he said, "for they're beginning the last galop before supper, and I'm engaged for it."

So Mrs. Selwyn James brought a cloud to her husband's brow that night, and a doubt to his heart, for worse than nothing. The game was a difficult one, and Sir Victor Cleeve was not willing to help her to play it.

"Haven't you had enough of this business, Alice?" Mr. James asked, when Sir Victor had deposited and left her.

"I'm not tired, if you mean that, Selwyn."

"It seems to me to be going very slowly," he rejoined. "But then I hate spinning round like a teetotum. *You* seemed giddy just now."

"No, I wasn't. When?"

"Just now; the last galop, I think it was."

Now, she had danced the last galop with her brother-in-law, and he was an admirable dancer, and she had given herself up entirely to the delights of the pace. It was not in Alice's power to hold herself "straight as a dart" when whirling round with velocity, and she was conscious that she had subsided, so to say, on her partner's shoulder. She remembered that she had done this, and she blushed at the remembrance when her husband said he thought she must have been giddy—blushed first at the remembrance, and then more vividly with indignation, for her partner had been her husband's brother.

"I was dancing with Conway," she answered, coldly. "I can't think how you could think I looked giddy—he never lets one slip or stagger."

"No, he held you a precious deal too tight for that," her husband replied, quickly. "I don't want to stop your dancing those insane dances, if they're any pleasure to you; but I wish to heaven you wouldn't loll right over a man's shoulder in the way you do. If you can't keep your head and your feet without being held in that way, I'd rather you didn't dance at all."

"Conway seems fascinated with Miss Cleeve, doesn't he?" she remarked, hoping to turn the tide of her husband's attention from her poor little peccadilloes. "Have you noticed them, Selwyn?"

"No," he said; "Miss Cleeve is a great deal too well bred to flirt in such a way as to attract attention. That's what I always disliked in your cousin Theodora, Alice; she's a nice, good-natured woman, but, God! she goes on a way that no wife of mine should go on in. Burroughes is a fool to permit it: if a woman doesn't know how to behave, the man she has married should teach her."

"I thought you liked Theodora, Selwyn? How you *can* say such *dreadful* things I can't think! You used to call her 'charming,' and say you could be alone with her for hours and never be dull."

"Yes, I know; she wasn't my wife—that makes a difference. I shouldn't care to have my wife 'charming' in that sort of way to other men, or to find them sitting at her feet reading perfumed poems for hours. But it's nothing to me what Theodora does; I only know that I ain't going to have you do the same."

Miss Cleeve laid her little train of managing powder very carefully, and fired it with the greatest circumspection and the grandest results. Plotting and intrigue are feminine specialities; if a woman does them at all with any heart and earnestness, she does them with a rare skill that a man may never hope to emulate. It was evolved as naturally as possible out of a conversation she held with Captain Conway James, that Sir Victor should be invited by that gentleman to go up and have a look at Aldershott.

"I don't say that it's a faultless copy of the regular blood-and-carnage business, but it's an uncommonly

good imitation of the dulness and discomfort of being under canvas in war time," Captain James said to Sir Victor, later in the night, when weariness had overtaken many, and woe more, for that their wreaths were partially demolished and all the freshness of their dresses gone off.

"Rather good fun, isn't it, on the whole?" Sir Victor asked.

"H'm! well, it's a kind of fun that soon palls on a fellow. Will you come up and try it? My quarters ain't extensive. The Beautiful wasn't much regarded in the formation of the place, though German influence was dominant, as usual, at the time. But if you'd like a life in a hut for a change, I can promise you as small and draughty a one as any man at Aldershott. Will you come?"

"Oh, do go, Victor!" Charlie said. She did think, honestly, that it would be a good thing for Victor to go away and gain a habit of manfully asserting himself through being thrown entirely with men for a time. He would be less liable, she hoped, to fall a matrimonial victim, without love, to Madge's machinations. Miss Cleeve maintained a strict silence on the subject. Well as she thought it for her future plans that he should go from her awhile, she could not bring herself to say a word that might hasten that departure which would render life at The Chase—comfortable, redolent of wealth, luxurious as it was—dull, tame, and unprofitable, barren, arid and cold to her. His presence, the tones of his voice, the flash of his eyes, the smile on his lips, had become more than meat and drink to her. She could not be herself when they were withdrawn—she flung out of their immediate presence. She knew that a great and visible portion of her vitality would go when he departed for this trip to Aldershott that should make her *caviare* to him on his return. "My heart will weary to death for him," she said to herself, passionately. Still she thought of the good that might, that must ensue, and she resolved that he should go.

And soon he went; sooner than she expected; for

Mr. James spoke more severely than was well in a man and a brother on the subject of Conway and Alice's manner to each other.

"I know you mean nothing, but she'll get the name of a flirt before she knows what flirting is, or what she's about, all through her trying to follow the cursed example of that woman at The Oaks; and it's a name that I don't choose my wife to have," Mr. James said to Conway a few days after the ball at The Chase.

"All right, old fellow—great humbug on your part! But if you don't like your wife to be friendly with me I've nothing to say against it. I'll go away to-day if you like."

"That's absurd; and as to being friendly, that's nonsense, too! Be as friendly as you like, only——"

He did not say what; and his brother, accompanied by Sir Victor Cleeve, left for Aldershot the next day.

A fuller explanation of the reason why he did so, will be found in the following letter from Mrs. Selwyn James to her cousin, Mrs. Burroughes:—

"MY DEAR THEODORA," (*she wrote*)—

"You told me not to bother you with a letter until I had something to write about. I think you will acknowledge when you receive this that I have"—here Alice's pen faltered; she desired to write with the dignified ease and confident strength of a married woman, and she was conscious that without the greatest care her letter would be full of the graphic tautologies of a school-girl—"obeyed you. The ball at The Chase on the 25th was very pleasant. I wore the white moire that's gored at every breadth, with the Honiton lace tunic, looped up with white roses, and pearls and white roses in my hair. . It sat beautifully over my sans-flectum. You were afraid there was too much fulness in front, but there wasn't a bit. It was much the handsomest dress in the room, though the Miss Cleeves' dresses were very pretty. I didn't dance every time, but I might have done so, for of course everybody paid me a great deal of attention, especially Sir Victor

Cleeve (more about him when we meet). ('Oh, gracious! I hope not,' was Mrs. Burroughes's commentary on this passage). Selwyn's brother went with us; I thought it would be only good-natured to the Lisles to take him, for of course there are not many men like him about here. He is excessively agreeable, can talk about everything, and I danced with him a great deal, and Selwyn got *dreadfully* jealous, and said terrible things. Since the ball, I went out into papa's shrubbery several times with Conway, with just my shawl over my head, and Selwyn had words with Conway about it, and though there was nothing at all in it, Conway very nobly and generously went away at once. Selwyn says I shall not scamper about like an unmarried girl (Selwyn had really said, 'like a dairy-maid,' but that Alice elected to ignore), and that I must adapt myself to my new and important position. I suppose I shall have fearful work with him when I get to Royston Hall, for I shall insist upon going out, and seeing who I like at home. Do write to me and give me your advice.

"You affectionate cousin,

"ALICE JAMES."

Mrs. Burroughes's reply was couched in these terms—

"DEAR ALICE—The opening of your note gave me palpitation of the heart, which subsided towards the end. If knocking under to your husband's little prejudices will make things pleasanter, you'll be a goose not to do so. I'm no rule, for it's strange, but true, that Mr. Burroughes has none.

"Yours affectionately,

"THEODORA BURROUGHES."

No one would assist Alice in playing this difficult game, not even the woman who played it so well herself.

Miss Cleeve had enacted her laborious part well. None knew that she had longed for, yet dreaded Sir Victor's departure for a while, and Sir Victor was gone—gone to Aldershot, where he would be with men and men alone.

CHAPTER XV

FALSE MOVES

MISS CLEEVE, before Sir Victor left them, had said to him in an offhand way, "Oh! Victor, I may as well mention it while I think of it, papa hopes you'll write to him sometimes while you're away."

"Hadn't I better write to you or to Charlie?"

"Well, perhaps you had; and yet, on second thoughts, no, Victor. Papa said distinctly, 'I hope Victor will write to me occasionally while he is away.' If he had contemplated our corresponding he would not have said that."

"Just as you please—seems queer though, that I mustn't write to you if I like; however, I shall probably not be away long enough to make it worth while writing at all."

So she gave up the joy that it would have been to hear from him, because she would have no communication between Charlie and himself. She could not lay an embargo on her sister's correspondence without laying one on her own; and she accepted the alternative, though it was hard.

"If Charlie can only be got away somewhere on a visit before Victor's return, the game will be in my own hands," she thought. And then Victor being away, and it not being requisite for her attention to be fixed almost exclusively on the enemy's pieces, she surveyed her own side of the board, and keenly calculated her resources.

So far she had played this game of chess well. She had castled her king (Victor was safely away at Aldershott for a time), and she felt that for the present she might cease from her incessant guard that he was not checkmated. But Charlie was a terrible though partially unconscious opponent, and when the king came out of his stronghold, Charlie, unless previously crippled, would be dangerous.

She paused, this clever young lady, and surveyed her

board; and then she pushed on a pawn in the shape of showing great politeness to Mrs. Selwyn James, and by so doing she gained another man.

The bride was an amiable woman, and she was possessed of the other qualities that usually accompany amiability. She was by no means stubborn in her strength, or given to the offensive exertion of her own judgment. She was mortified at this epoch at the curt notice her cousin Theodora had accorded to her thrilling experiences. And so, when Miss Cleeve told her that she would be rather dull at Royston Hall if her husband meant to hunt much, she believed that she would be dull, and asked Miss Cleeve to go and stay with her.

"I shall be delighted to do so at some other time; but just now I'm of great assistance to papa," Miss Cleeve replied. "You see, the whole management of the house falls upon me, for papa will have it more rigorously looked after than if it was his own. He wants to render up a good account of his guardianship when the time for our leaving The Chase comes. But if you would accept Charlie as my substitute, I should be very grateful to you, dear Alice; she wants a change to a bracing air for a time, this place is too relaxing for her."

And Mrs. Selwyn James reflecting, that of the two, her husband preferred the younger to the elder Miss Cleeve, said she would, with pleasure.

"But you must not let Charlie know that I have been instrumental in gaining such a delightful invitation for her," Madge hinted. "I needn't tell you that, though; you're sure to do it in your own graceful way."

Mrs. Selwyn James beamed with smiles of acquiescence and satisfaction; she felt appreciated, and very important, and exquisitely conscious of her colossal claims as a married woman. She felt that it would be pleasant indeed to take the golden-haired Miss Cleeve back to Royston Hall with her. It would show the Lisles how intimate they had been before her marriage—for Alice was not aware of how fully her father had confided in his lofty cousins. Added to this, the presence of the golden-haired Miss Cleeve would be an attraction

to her house—through her agency it might, without offence to her husband, come to compete with Theodora's. Further, she could delicately give Charlie to understand that if she (Alice) had not been in such urgent request, she might have married Sir Victor Cleeve; and still one more reason for her cordial acquiescence might be given, her husband was occasionally what she called grumpy, therefore Charlie's companionship would be pleasant.

Life at The Chase was not such an exhilarating thing, now that Victor's presence was withdrawn, but that a brief respite from it could be contemplated with pleasure.

"It's very kind of her to ask you, but I suppose you won't go?" Miss Cleeve said, when Charlie mentioned before them all at dinner that she had received a kind cordial invitation from Mrs. Selwyn James.

"It's very kind of her; and I most certainly shall go," Charlie immediately responded. Madge had infused a semi-tone of disapproval into her remarks on the scheme, and it roused Charlie into antagonism at once. "That is, I shall go if papa sees no objection," she added.

"I have no objection whatever," Mr. Cleeve said, peevishly; "and even if I had, you'd probably end by pleasing yourself."

"Oh! papa, not if it was displeasing to you," Charlie remonstrated; and Miss Cleeve felt that she had better make another demonstration of opposition to the plan, or Charlie might give it up.

"Papa didn't mean that it would be displeasing to him Charlie—only, like me, I suppose he feels rather surprised at your wishing to go away and stay with her. You never cared much about her society when she was living here."

"I dare say I didn't, but all the same I intend going to Royston Hall for the full enjoyment of her society now—by papa's leave."

So again Miss Cleeve was triumphant.

Life at The Chase was not an exhilarating thing at this epoch. Mr. Cleeve had ceased from exhibiting that perfect satisfaction with the present, if it was agreeable,

which had once characterized him. He was restless and uneasy about what the future might possibly bring to him. "I have had so much botheration all my life till just now, that I can't contemplate a renewal of it with fortitude," he would say to his eldest daughter. "I wish to goodness that boy would marry one of you—if either of you were half so attractive as your poor mother was, he would have done it before now. But you can't be compared to her—you can't be compared to her in any way."

She passed over his complaints about their inferiority to her mother, whom he had bullied into her grave in his own special harassing, gentlemanly way, in silence.

"Wait, papa—wait—wait," she said, looking past him dreamily, as if she saw coming events on the wall behind his chair. "Wait only a little longer, dear, only a little longer, and the end that you desire *shall* come on."

"Ah! so you said months ago," he replied, pettishly, "and it hasn't come yet; and now there's this boy to educate and start in life, and how am I to do it? How am I to do it, I ask you?" he repeated, throwing himself back in his chair and looking angrily at Madge, as if she was answerable for the existence of her young brother.

"Poor little baby!" she said, laughing; "his education and future career needn't be a question for some years to come, at all events, papa."

"Ah! very well for you to say that—like a woman, so devilish thoughtless and inconsiderate," he muttered.

She did not remind him that the boy was his son, or he would have declared that she was undutifully hurling reproaches at him for having contracted a second marriage. She only said quietly—

"Wait a little longer, papa, and all will be well."

Mr. Cleeve's daughters had no ill feeling towards the poor little interloper who was not their mother's son. They both, on the contrary, regarded him very kindly. "How it would have been if he were a bore to us, and we had to nurse him, I don't know," Charlie said candidly to Mrs. James; "but as it is, we only see him at his best." And Miss Cleeve, when the boy was brought under her notice, would chirrup to him, and pat his

cheeks, and whisper in his unconscious ears that he was a dear little thing now, but that he would have been intolerable in Sloane Street.

"A life of genteel poverty with a brat in the house!—No! Papa needn't be afraid. I'll leave no stone unturned to avoid *that*," Madge thought, after holding a similar conversation to the one just related with her father. "I should detest the child in such a case."

Mrs. Lisle bestowed much advice upon her daughter when she was about to leave, with her husband, for her new home—much, doubtless, sound, but extremely difficult to follow—advice about many things. And Mr. Lisle added a word or two that had the merit of being to the point—

"If you want to be happy with your husband, Alice," he said, "you'll avoid all men friends and women confidants—both are bad."

And that speech of her father's showed Mrs. Selwyn James that her husband had hinted his disapproval of Theodora's line of conduct.

Royston Hall was a pretty place. The house was originally Elizabethan, but it had been enlarged and improved in the next century, and its architecture was mixed. It was roomy and handsome, well furnished and commodious, and Alice revelled in being mistress of it—and only sighed that she was not mistress of the far grander Chase when her husband was grumpy with her.

For he was guilty of this error—of indulging in prolonged and almost sulky fits of silence when she annoyed him in any way. If he had flown into a rage with her and blown her out of her mind nearly in a gust of passion, she would still have found it easier to endure than this habit he had of brooding over things with a leaden brow. But he was a reserved, obstinate man, not a passionate one—and God help the woman who falls under the sway of such a one.

She was ductile to a degree, and he might have moulded her to his will, and had her adore him into the bargain. But he gave way to gloom on the smallest provocation, and Alice began to dread, first his ill humour, and then himself.

He was not at all the same man who had made the hours fly in her cousin's drawing-room. He left off being devotional to her—treating her in a matter-of-fact way that a wife of ten years' standing may like well enough, but that a wife of scarcely ten weeks' standing cannot be expected to admire.

And withal, though he was not devoted to or fraught with admiration for her, he expected much from her in return. He restricted intercourse with her cousin Theodora to the narrowest limits. "You have Miss Cleeve with you, and what more can you want?" he would say, when she would humbly propose going over to The Oaks. "If it's women's society you want, you have it already, and if it's men's, I don't choose you to have it in the way Theodora has. You can't always have excitement; life isn't made up of it, and you should conquer your weak craving for it."

She would listen patiently to this exposition of his sentiments, but she found the patient listening a hard thing to achieve. It was all very true, no doubt: but it was also masterful and unsympathetic, and—well, not at all what she had expected from her husband. If he had been less cold and reserved, she would have cared for nothing else than his presence; but as it was, the honour and glory of being mistress of Royston Hall palled upon her.

"I am sure you're a blessing to me—what shall I do when you are gone?" the bride would say to Charlie Cleeve, coming shivering into the latter's room at night, for the chat that made that hour the most pleasant one of the day. And Charlie would avoid answering this remark, for it occurred to her that the spirit which dictated it was not the safest in the world for a young wife to be possessed of. The next alleviation she might seek would perchance be a less blameless one.

"Wouldn't it be nice to ask Conway and Sir Victor here for a few days, Charlie?" Mrs. Selwyn James suggested to her guest one day, and Charlie could not controul the delight which flushed her face and flashed forth from her eyes at the prospect.

"Yes, very nice indeed ; has Mr. James proposed it?"

The bride's face fell.

"No, he hasn't," she replied ; "but I'll put it to him that it would be nice and civil now you're staying with us, to ask your cousin to come. It would be a change for us—and I can't think that Selwyn will object, for there is nothing to object to."

"Only that Mr. James is so very fond of quiet," Charlie said dubiously.

"Well, they needn't make a noise—and I don't suppose they would," Alice answered ; "but it's no use counting on it, for as sure as I do he will say 'no' when I ask. Oh, dear ! I wish I knew what he *did* like besides finding fault with me and being grumpy. I'm sure I'm treated more like a child than I ever was at home."

"It is because he is so fond of you," Charlie interposed : "of course he's very proud of you, and particular about you ; and it's what I should like the man I married to be."

"Nonsense ; that you wouldn't if you once had a taste of Mr. James's pride and particularity ; I call it suspicious sulkiness ; he doesn't care to make me happy, and laugh himself ; and he doesn't like anybody else to do it. And when I say anything, he tells me life isn't 'all happiness and laughing,' and he wishes I'd not crave for excitement so."

The tears stood in the bride's eyes, and Charlie, despite the weakness evinced, pitied her.

Miss Cleeve, confident in her security away at The Chase, in that western county, the climate of which had relaxed her sister's nerves, would have been shaken to the centre of her soul if she could have heard this colloquy. If Sir Victor and Charlie met at Royston Hall—thrown as they would infallibly be upon their own and each other's devices and society, things most probably would come to such a climax as Madge would be powerless to interfere with or prevent.

"I shall put it to Selwyn that it would only be nice and civil to you, to ask your cousin to come here for a few days," Alice said to Charlie. And Charlie flushed

with delight at the prospect, and did not say nay to the proposition.

Very judiciously, indeed, did the young wife, who was rapidly gaining experience, put her proposal to her liege lord that same day before luncheon; and very quietly and without the smallest sign of disapprobation did her liege lord listen thereunto.

"Well! we'll think about it," he said; "I see no reason why they shouldn't come for a few days, though I confess to thinking it pleasant to have one's house to one's self occasionally—but we'll think about it in a day or two; Aldershott won't be swallowed up with all it contains in the meantime, I dare say."

And then the master of the house walked in to luncheon, followed by his wife; he had left off the "folly" of insisting upon her taking precedence of him on all occasions of migration from one room to another—the bad breeding would come out in something.

Charlie Cleeve joining them presently, the mid-day repast commenced, and went on more pleasantly and cheerfully than meals usually did at Royston Hall. A strong element of happiness seemed to be diffused throughout Mrs. James's whole being, and Charlie judged from that, that her plea for the invasion from Aldershott had been granted. And when she formed this judgment, an element of happiness diffused itself throughout Charlie's being also; for the thought of seeing her cousin again was rarely pleasant to her.

"Shall we have a ride this afternoon, Charlie?" Mrs. James asked, as they stood at the window after luncheon looking out through the rarefied atmosphere over the fields and lanes of the flat country around.

"Yes, you had better do so," Mr. James replied, answering for his guest; "I want the horses to go out—they're too full of corn, and I want them exercised. You had better ride Jerry, Alice; your mare was sent out this morning, so you'd better ride Jerry."

"Will you go with us, Selwyn?" she asked; "I've never ridden Jerry yet, you know."

"If I didn't know that he was quiet I shouldn't tell

you to ride him, Alice. If you're afraid of the horse there's an end of it; if you're not, I had rather he went out than the mare, for she has had exercise already. I can't go with you, because I'm engaged."

"Let me ride Jerry," Charlie interposed.

"No, no," Alice answered hastily, "I'll ride him; I'm not afraid, Selwyn."

"Well, there's nothing to be afraid of, if you manage him decently," he replied. "I'll go and order the horses, then you'll have time for a good long ride."

Now he knew that Jerry was a safe mount for his wife; had he not known it, he would not on any account have suggested that she should ride him. But he had made the suggestion with apparent carelessness, and he had scoffed at the little expressions of doubt she had given vent to, hoping that they would call forth warm assurances from him in return; but he had been outwardly careless of her safety and had shown disregard of her feelings, and the poor young wife was outraged. Had he been tender to her, and fondly fearful for her, she would have been capable of riding Cruiser before Rarey had tamed him. But Mr. James had been none of these things, therefore Mrs. James went to put on her habit in a huff.

He knew the horse well, and he had taken every precaution that could insure safety before his wife came down, but he made no demonstration of having done so.

"Good-bye; I hope you'll enjoy yourselves," he said, nodding to them, and turning away into the house.

As soon as he had put them up, "without even looking to see if the bit was properly fastened, or *anything*," Alice said, indignantly—

"And I've never ridden this beast before."

"I daresay he did see to it before we came out," Charlie remonstrated. "He was out here with the horses before we came down; I saw him from my bedroom window."

"That was to look at his precious horses, not to see to his wife's safety," Alice replied; "such indifference—and such temper together! I believe he's showing it

to-day because he was obliged to say 'yes' for want of an excuse for saying 'no,' when I asked him to invite Conway and Sir Victor here."

"You are too exacting, Alice," Charlie said, kindly; "he has neither shown indifference nor temper; he's not a demonstrative man, but he's so fond of you that you ought to forgive that."

"It is easy for you to talk; you are not his wife. If you were, you would like him to seem to care whether your neck was broken or not. As he has chosen to show such absolute disregard for my feelings, I shall not be so fastidious about consulting his wishes. We'll go and call on Theodora."

"We had better not; as you didn't tell Mr. James that you were going to The Oaks."

"Fiddle-de-dee—I didn't think of going when I came out; now I do think of going, and I shall go. He didn't want my company this afternoon. I asked him to come with us, and he said 'no,' he was engaged; and he didn't think it worth while to tell me how. You must allow that there can be no harm in my going to call on Theodora."

Charlie's prophetic soul moved her to say once more, "I think you had better not;" but Jerry's rider held to her own will for once.

CHAPTER XVI.

A COUNTRY KETTLEDRUM.

Mrs. BURNOUGHES'S drawing-room was particularly pleasant on this special afternoon. It was always a bright room; if there chanced to be but a single sunbeam in the sky it surely made its way in at one of her windows, and this afternoon it looked particularly bright and pleasant. She had that morning received a box from Mudie's, and a lot of new *cartes-de-visite*, and she was becomingly dressed and in excellent spirits and temper. When the two Amazons came in, she welcomed them with that little air of their being the very individuals she was

most anxious to see, which rendered her such a charming hostess. And the group around her immediately followed her lead, and absorbed them into the conversation, instead of suffering them to feel that their entrance had thrown a damper over it.

"Take your hats off, and have tea at half-past four with me, Alice," Theodora said. "You'll have plenty of time after that to get home and dress for dinner at six."

"No, Dora; we didn't mean to stay so long. The horses will catch cold."

"They shall be taken round to the stable. Ring the bell, Mr. Wynne, thank you." And before Alice could utter more than one feeble protest, the horses were ordered round to the stable, and she was compromised into remaining to have some tea at half-past four.

In addition to her new books and photographs, Mrs. Burroughes had her usual group of satellites about her, some of the best and most amusing of her band. Many of them Alice had known when she was Miss Lisle, but then she had been powerless to attract them from the side of her fascinating cousin. Now she was a married woman, and therefore much more deserving of attention.

There were one or two present who would willingly enough assist pretty Mrs. James of Royston Hall in playing the game she had failed in rousing Sir Victor Cleeve to engage in. They were young men, most of them—very young men indeed; and their estimate of what was manly and distinguished was false. Mrs. Burroughes knew how to keep them in order, and despite the hard things Selwyn James said about her, did keep them in order. They were free to call upon her, and sit as long as they liked, or as long as they amused her—free to wear her colours, as it were, and proclaim themselves of her army of adorers, but they were not free to be sentimental to or about her. When they tried to be so she broke them, put them at the bottom of her list or dismissed them from her service altogether.

But Alice took things more seriously than her cousin, and Theodora, watching her that afternoon, felt that,

after all, perhaps Mr. James was not so very wrong to mount guard over her as he did.

By-and-by they waxed more merry still over their cups of bohea, which they sipped out of delicate white Sèvres, and the young men began to throw out baits for the future presence of the two Amazons at these gatherings; for they were quite alive to the beauty and *esprit* of the golden-haired Miss Cleeve.

There was a young drawing-room buffoon amongst them, who was ready to display his versatile talents on or without the smallest provocation. He was the Mr. Wynne who had rung the bell and ordered the horses round, and his having been thus actively instrumental in their detention, appeared to him a fair basis for greater intimacy with Mrs. Selwyn and Miss Cleeve than was accorded to the others.

He was great in his imitations of those renowned actors whom Charlie had seen surreptitiously in the old London days, and Alice had never seen at all. And as he kindly informed his audience which one he was "taking off" each time, they found the imitations excellent, and applauded him highly for his delicate appreciation of the minute shades of difference between the rarely refined humour of Bedford or Toole and the effortless tragic power of Kean. It was all new to Alice and exciting, and surely it was a harmless excitement enough, this laughing at the self-satisfied folly of a well-educated young gentleman who aspired to take his stand in society on this basis of carefully-cultivated buffoonery. She rejoiced aloud over his impersonation of "Medea" after Robson's pattern; the tears came into her eyes when, with a bewitching French accent, he made himself unpleasantly magnanimous as the outraged jealous Moor; and she was being gradually inoculated with a faint idea of what the humour of Dundreary consisted in, when the door opened, and Mr. Burroughes and Selwyn James came into the room.

Mr. Sothern's marvellously life-like rendering of the manners and customs of a well-dressed imbecile had just attracted the appreciatory attention of the intellectual,

and Mr. Wynne esteemed his copy of the "letter scene" especially, a remarkably good one. When her husband entered the room, Mr. Wynne was planted, opposite to Alice, with a letter she had lent him for the purpose in his hand, going through the scene with unction and apparently for her special behoof. He dropped Dundrearyism and came back to common sense in a spasm, as the stern face of the master of Royston Hall met his view.

"And so on—there's a lot more of it, and it's very good if you could see Sothorn do it," Mr. Wynne said, nervously.

And then Alice, glancing behind her to see what had caused this rapid transformation, met her husband's eyes, and started to her feet with a faint cry.

There was a strong element of comedy in the situation for the others, but not for Alice James.

"I just came in to speak to Theodora, Selwyn, and I stayed a little, but I was coming away almost directly," she faltered; and he replied—

"I see you stayed. How do you do, Mrs. Burroughes; will you be good enough to let me order my wife's home?"

He put his hand on the bell as he spoke, and Mrs. Burroughes nodded her head in assent. But she had no notion of being reprimanded by anybody's husband's manner in her own house.

"Why didn't you come with Alice?" she asked; "Mr. Wynne has been amusing us all so much that I'm sorry you didn't come in for a share of the fun."

"Alice did not tell me that she was coming here," he replied; "if she had not made a secret of her intention, I should probably have accompanied her, for I wanted to speak to your husband about the next meet."

Mrs. Selwyn James had put on her hat, and the horses had come round to the door before she had regained sufficient courage to say a word. Then she came up and tried to say good-bye in an off-hand way to Theodora.

"You'll come over and see me soon?" she asked.

"Oh! yes; and" (she whispered the remainder into Alice's ear), "don't knock under too much, or *he* won't

know where to stop, my dear;" and then Alice found herself hustled out of the room and on to her horse before she could reply.

Mr. Wynne's light had been put under a bushel by the unexpected entrance of the husband of the lady he was laying himself out to amuse. He had held his hand out in a weak moment to Selwyn James, and Selwyn James had not elected to see the extended hand, but had passed it by utterly, and the imitator of Dundreary felt aggrieved thereat, and very properly indignant. He just waited to see how the wind blew after the James's had departed, and then finding that both Mr. Burroughes and his wife were disposed to think that Mr. James had displayed unnecessary temper, he said—

"Your cousin's husband can't keep right side up, with care even!—Shouldn't think too many gentlemen have held out their hands to him that he need refuse one when it's offered."

Now, Mr. Wynne was a privileged pet of Mrs. Burroughes's, but still she deemed it well that he should feel a touch of the curb occasionally.

"My cousin's husband is—my cousin's husband, Mr. Wynne," she said; "I'll trouble you to remember that fact when you're speaking about him to me. My dar," she continued, turning to her husband, "what made you bring him like a thunderbolt into our midst?"

"I didn't know Alice was here," he replied; "and even if I had known it I should like him to give me a reason why his or any other man's wife mightn't be in *my* wife's company without his giving her black looks."

She rose and placed her hand on his arm; it was this simple reliance he had on her which made her overlook a multitude of his sins of omission.

"Thank you, Frank," she said; "I heartily wish, poor child, that my cousin's husband would take a leaf out of your book."

And then as she had risen her guests knew that it was time for them to depart. So they went, but, before she went to dress for dinner, she repeated those words to her husband, and added,

"But he's become foolish, Frank—he suspects and distrusts her, poor harmless guileless child!"

The harmless guileless child was having a most wretched time of it meanwhile. Charlie Cleeve had marked her nervousness before they mounted, and had whispered an offer of an exchange of steeds, but to this Mrs. James would not listen.

"No; he'll be more angry with me if I do," she said, tremulously.

And then Charlie's blood had tingled through her veins, for that this man should be so blind to his own interests as to make himself an object of fear to the gentle timid girl who would have been ruled by love of him alone, if he would have let her.

The trio rode along the road that led to Royston Hall in silence for some time, long enough for it to become oppressive to Charlie, who had disobeyed no marital decree in going to The Oaks. Her spirit rebelled at being made to feel that she had been guilty of connivance in disobedience to this autocratic son of a counter-jumper, who clothed himself in a garment of proud reserve that didn't fit him. She reined up close to her friend's husband at last, and broke the silence by saying,

"Jerry carries a lady very well, Mr. James, or else Alice manages him with most marvellous skill. I understood that he had never had a habit flop against his side before."

"She's fidgeting him hideously now," he replied, glancing towards his wife, who, in acute consciousness of his ill-tempered observation, immediately drew her rein more sharply than suited the taste of the fine-mouthed horse.

"She rode him beautifully all the way we went," Charlie replied, rather angrily; "if she's less judicious now, it is because she's nervous at the idea of your being annoyed with her for going to The Oaks, where she only went because she thought it would please me."

"There is never any occasion for a wife to be excused to her husband if she hasn't been doing wrong," he replied coldly. And then Charlie felt that Victor's lost love had a hard man to deal with.

She had not been doing wrong; she could have knelt and bared her heart to the world (that far harsher judge than the God who made it!) and sworn to the singleness of her purpose and the simple purity of her acts; but for all her conscious innocence and integrity, her heart went very low indeed when he followed her up into her dressing-room and banished her maid, who forthwith knelt down outside, applied her ear to the keyhole, and "heer'd the 'ole of it."

Instinctively the poor frightened young wife attempted to disarm him by using the only weapons she had--her tenderness and helplessness. She laid her head on his shoulder as he turned after shutting the door, and murmured--

"Selwyn! you are not going to be cross to me, are you?"

"Cross to you?" he responded angrily, putting her away from him; "no; but I'm not going to let your confounded childishness come in the way of my doing my duty. I'm not going to be humbugged in this way, Alice. It's no use your crying and whining; you've been guilty of a piece of cursed deception and trickery, and you shall learn my opinion about it."

She was sobbing now as much with wrath as fear--this poor young girl to whom in his arrogance he could be neither manly nor soft.

"Such a nasty low piece of deceit," he went on; "to go there in such a way."

"You can't think it's pleasant to me, Selwyn, to have my cousin's house spoken of as a place to which I ought not to go."

"Whether it's pleasant or not, you will find it so spoken of while she conducts it in such a preciously loose way," he replied, angrily; "and you can't think that it's pleasant for me to go into a room where I didn't expect to see my wife, and to find her laughing like a hyæna at the grimaces--the disgusting grimaces and folly of an insolent young puppy."

She dried her tears, and answered him without sobbing--

"You speak very harshly of this trifle, Selwyn; what more could you say if I really *had* done something wrong."

He thought that she was defying him, and his wrath rose higher against her.

"By God, madam," he replied, "you'd find I shouldn't content myself with saying them—I should *act*, and so you'll find."

"You've made up your mind that I shall do so, then?" she asked, with a touch of scorn in her tone that was a new thing altogether to him. "Well, Selwyn, I'm sorry—that is all I can say."

He felt that he had gone a little too far, that all dignity had been lost sight of in his ill-temper, and that his burst of bullying had weakened the wholesome dread his wife had hitherto felt for him; but he was determined on not allowing her to perceive that he thought he had so erred.

"Your being sorry is no good," he said; "that wont alter matters; it wont restore my confidence in you, or do away with the fact of your having placed me in a false position."

"You couldn't have had much confidence in me before, or such a thing wouldn't have weakened it."

"Perhaps I had not; at any rate events have proved that I wasn't justified in having much. And if you call disobeying me, and flirting boisterously with an abominable young puppy, 'a trifle,' I am sorry that your sense of common propriety is so imperfect."

With that he conveyed himself out of her room, and poor Alice was free to dress for dinner, and think over what he had said.

His dogmatic, authoritative manner was eating into her soul like iron, and turning her heart away from him. She might have been so easily moulded to his will, if he had not gone about the task with hard, unsympathetic hands. She would have been delighted at laying burnt-offerings and oblations at his shrine, had he shown himself ready to accept them lovingly and kindly. Without remorse she would have sacrificed any friendship and any friend

to his prejudices, if with tenderness and tact he had solicited her to do so. But he had been deficient in these qualities, and her pride and her love were both wounded, and her heart was hardened against the man who strove to rule it through fear, not love.

The dinner that day was one of bitterness. In vain Charlie attempted to say something that should oblige her host or hostess to say something in return. Mr. James merely smiled grimly, and confined himself to inquiries as to what she would take. And Alice was sorrowfully subdued and utterly unable to shake off her silent depression.

Miss Charlie Cleeve declined to treat that visit to The Oaks as if it had been an iniquitous proceeding, and one about which it would be well to maintain silence. She thought that to do so would be a mute acknowledgment that she considered they had done very wrong indeed. And though she had attempted, for the sake of peace and quietness, to dissuade Mrs. James from going, she was not disposed to cry *mea culpa* about it.

"I hope this wont last much longer," Alice said, when they were alone. "I hope he will recover his temper before Conway and Sir Victor come."

"I'm sure I hope so too," Charlie responded. "Bother and beguile him into a better frame of mind, Alice; don't look resentful, and take his very great care of you as a compliment. I should go in now and ask him to come in here, cheerfully, instead of letting him sit in that dull dining-room, nursing his wrath to keep it warm."

"I don't care for his company while he's so sulky and silent, thank you. Oh dear! I can't tell you what I feel, Charlie! It's too hard to be scolded and sulked with in this way for nothing. If it hadn't been for him I might have married your cousin. Did you know *that*?"

"Yes, I knew it."

"He ought to remember that; he ought to think of what he has made me lose."

"That is nonsense," Charlie said, decidedly. "He has honoured you as much as a man can honour you, and

your thinking that he ought perpetually to bear in mind that if he hadn't married you somebody else might, is absurd and ridiculous."

"I wonder what Victor will think when he sees how I'm treated?" Alice persisted; and young as Charlie Cleeve herself was, she felt this speculation betokened an unsafe frame of mind. It is never well when a wife takes to wondering how the course of conduct pursued towards her by her husband will strike another man.

But shortly all uneasiness on this score was set at rest. Sir Victor would have no opportunity of betraying dangerous sympathy for the mistress of Royston Hall, for the master of it refused to invite him. When Alice timidly hinted that he had promised to ask his brother and Sir Victor for a few days, while the latter's cousin was staying with them, he frowned ominously, and remarked that he wished to feel that the house was his own for awhile. "Miss Cleeve can have plenty of her cousin's society at The Chase," he added.

"Yes, Selwyn; but it's rather dull for her here."

"Then she can leave if she likes, I suppose," he said. "I don't want to have my house to get the name that your cousin's has, of a place where men can go and flirt with any pretty girl with impunity."

"I wonder you could take a wife from such a house," she said coldly.

"I didn't—I took you from Lisle Court; and it is shown plainly enough what Sir Bernard and Lady Lisle think of the goings on in their eldest daughter's house, when they won't let her own sister go there."

"That is only because they are afraid she might marry badly—beneath her," Alice explained. "They don't think there's any harm, but they are afraid of the men who go there trying to marry Ida."

And then Mr. Selwyn said, "Pshaw—absurdity!" and got hot in the face as he reflected that he had been one of the men the Lisles had so looked down upon.

CHAPTER XVII.

CHARLIE AND ALICE BOTH ASSERT THEMSELVES.

A TERRIBLE weight of gloom settled down over Charlie's mind when she found that her hopes of Sir Victor's coming to Royston Hall were utterly overthrown. She had not planned this treat of his presence herself. It had been proposed to her, and she felt that she had been tricked into a glad acquiescence, and that now, through no fault of her own, she was being defrauded of her right.

It was not a dignified proceeding on the part of the head of the house, this going from his word, which had been passed to invite Conway and Sir Victor, because his wife had annoyed him. Alice felt great anger with him, and Charlie great contempt for him; his development of the meanest traits of jealousy was weakening all consideration for his feelings as a man and a husband that his young guest had entertained for him at first. Charlie did not know how cherished the thought of meeting Victor free from the weight of home influence had been to her until it was put to flight by the weak caprice of Mr. Selwyn James.

She grew weary of the normal gloom and the chronic bickering at Royston Hall, and resolved upon writing and announcing her intention of returning to The Chase. But the news from home in reply to her announcement was bad, and her return positively forbidden.

Again fate intervened to prevent a helping, saving hand being held out to the young baronet, who had been got away to Aldershot to acquire additional manliness through being thrown with men alone! Mr. Selwyn James had been a little instrument of that perverse fate by preventing his meeting with that frank young cousin to whom he had confided all in a letter which lay awaiting her at The Chase, and which she did not get until it was too late to save Victor. And how she was forbidden to go home, where she would have found that letter,

because Miss Cleeve was ill of a fever, and the doctor would not allow of her sister's return.

The continual strain on Madge's mind, the strong necessity for "action," constant and unceasing, the perpetual watching, the wearying anxiety, the love, the jealousy, the dread that her oath might never be fulfilled, had told on the frame of the girl, and brought her to the edge of the grave. Women can go on enduring for ever—their fate in life is to be passive; but when they are compelled to cease from that, and act, and intrigue, and exert every energy both of mind and body, when compelled to do this, the pace soon kills. They start with a turn of speed that looks like winning, but few can stay the distance.

So far all had prospered with her. She had got Victor away to a society from which he would return more pervious than before to her attacks. Her sister was out of her way, and the object of Victor's calf-love was married. So far all was well. But she revolved possible eventualities in her mind till it wavered, and her brain reeled. Sleep and appetite deserted her; she was madly ambitious and madly in love, and the object of her love and ambition might elude her grasp. She could know no peace, she could take no rest, till both were realized. She longed for rest, but she could know none till her aim was achieved. This state of things may go on for a while, and all around may be unconscious of the volcano that is working and seething in the perturbed breast. But it ends in a moment, as it did with Madge, who, with a cry of rage and pain, woke to the knowledge one morning that she was ill—burnt up with a fever against which she could not battle.

That phase of feeling which induces the sufferer to believe that he or she will be better if the anguish of quick-coming utter incapability is not "given way to," must be familiar to all in this land of fever and ague. Madge Cleeve tried to tell herself that she had a cold, and would be all right after a cup of tea. And then she sank half dressed on the bed, and lay there enduring much from the intolerable recurrence of the words,

"partial obliteration of the hopes of the white rose on a summer day," and others that were equally void of sense and meaning. She was bound by a will she could not resist to keep on repeating them, and her reason struggled fiercely to understand *why* she said them, and what they meant. Then her lips grew more parched, and her head more restless, and she threw her hands up above her head presently with a cry that she "was ill—or mad!"

So she was found by her maid, and so she remained for a month.

A letter in Sir Victor's handwriting had arrived for Charlie a day or two previous to the breaking forth of the fever. It was the first time he had broken through the rule that Madge had laid down as to the non-correspondence between themselves and him, and it plunged her into bitter anxiety and uncertainty.

The lax *régime* under which her childhood had been passed, the even more faulty one of her maturer years, had done this strong-passioned, intense-natured girl incalculable harm. She had been taught to regard "appearances saved" as the salvation of all things, and lightly to regard ugly faults and follies so long as they were elegantly draped and cleverly concealed. She was not one to tremble and turn aside from the shadow of a peril, or even from the peril itself. She was not one either to falter at the doing of a dubious deed, if that deed done would further her end. She was capable of doing a great wrong, this clear-headed young lady, but she was scarcely capable of perpetrating a dishonourable petty meanness yet. She kept Victor's letter back in order that she might make up her mind whether or not she would forward it to Charlie, or throw it in the fire? She did not descend to the depths of opening it. But before she could decide, the fever broke out, and Victor's letter was forgotten.

As soon as Charlie heard that her sister was ill unto danger, if not unto death, her old affection for Madge revived, and she resolved upon going home to nurse her.

"But the doctors say you mustn't," Alice said; "your

father tells you that the doctors say you mustn't, and after that I call it courting disease to go."

"I couldn't tolerate any of them about me if I were ill; it would kill me to have mamma fidgeting and the servants blundering; after all, I should long for Madge," Charlie replied, and the tears started to her eyes as she said it.

"After all what?" Mrs. Selwyn James asked.

"Oh, many things! sisters often have little squabbles, you know. But now she is ill, I must go at once to poor dear Madge. Papa must have known I should go, if he knows anything at all about me."

"I shall miss you so much!" Mrs. Selwyn James pleaded, piteously.

"Well, when you have a fever or any other ailment I'll come back and nurse you; but I should be but a poor companion now with my heart away with Madge, as it would be, now I know her danger."

Mrs. Selwyn James put up a lip of dissatisfaction. "I shall be so dull—so horribly dull and wretched," she said; "Selwyn wont make this place pleasant to me; he wont try, and he lets me see that he wont try; and when I think of this going on for ever I feel as if I couldn't bear it."

"Don't talk up a grievance," Charlie said, kissing her.

"But it isn't an imaginary grievance to feel that every bit of love you had for a man once is ebbing away because he don't know how to keep it, and that, for all that you'll have to go on living with him, and never doing anything or seeing any one you like unless he pleases."

Mrs. Selwyn James had the look, as she said it, of a wild animal of a timid genus desirous of escape. The man she had married, sensible though he was in most things, had been a fool in his treatment of her. She was getting to be afraid of him. And hers was not a nature to dare under the influence of fear, but to deceive.

Charlie Cleeve had the will to give her young hostess good counsel at this juncture, but she had not the power of giving it effectively, for she was distraught on one or two points, and in need of good counsel herself. She

had a strong instinctive feeling that she would do right if she obeyed the dictates of her own heart, and went home at once to tend with all the skill love would teach her, that sick sister between whom and herself there had come a cloud. But then her father, backed by the medical mandate, had ordered her to remain where she was. And her father was an ill man to offend. So, though her resolve to go was unalterable, she carried it through with the conviction that she was in need of counsel herself as to how it would be best to tone down her disobedience in his eyes.

Alice James could not face the prospect with anything like cheerful resignation. "I shall be horribly desolate when you are gone," she said, pettishly, following Charlie up into her room, where that young lady was throwing the contents of the wardrobe on the floor preparatory to packing them up in her trunk.

"Oh! no, you won't—you only think so now because you're used to my being here."

"It's very provoking of your sister—I mean isn't it a pity that she should have been taken ill before your visit to me was up?"

"In the order of things it ought to have been over before now. Just think, I came here early in January, and now it's early in March."

"That only makes it the worse for me; if you hadn't stayed so long I shouldn't have felt it half so much. You would feel it too, if you were left without any one to speak to; as it is, I see you don't care."

Mrs. Selwyn James had been reminded of the existence of her husband on former occasions by Charlie, therefore she was spared an allusion to him now.

"Your gardens will be lovely in a week or two—the next two months will be delightful here, and then, you know, in June you are going to town," Charlie remarked by way of comfort.

"What is the use of talking in that way, Charlie?" Alice answered in an aggrieved tone, facing round abruptly from the window out of which she had been gazing. "A place is never delightful unless people make it

so ; and I don't care about a garden that I mustn't ask my own cousin to walk round when I please."

Charlie elected to ignore the allusion to Mrs. Burroughes—that lady being a fruitful source of discord at Royston Hall. "Mr. James likes Ida Lisle, Alice," she replied ; "he told you the other day that you could have her here as often as you liked."

"Wonderfully kind and considerate of him, wasn't it?" the young wife retorted angrily. "He knows that Ida Lisle is no sort of companion to me, with her school-girl airs. And he knows, besides, that my uncle and aunt would only allow her to come here before she's out. After that she'll be kept away from the contamination of any but the first county people's houses, and I don't wonder at it, for Mr. James is only a shopkeeper's son."

God help her ! it had come to this, that she could remember and name her husband's father to her husband's discredit.

Poor Alice James felt very sad and lonely as the carriage that was to convey Charlie to the railway station drove away. Sadder and more lonely than she had ever felt in her life before, and righteously indignant that it should be so, and she only married four months.

It was a biting, windy, early March morning, this one on which Miss Cleeve took her departure. The blasts came sharply round all the corners of the house apparently, and concentrated themselves with chilling force on Mrs. Selwyn James's person, as she stood outside looking after the best balm she had known during her wedded career. She gave a shudder as the carriage rolled out of sight, and then turned a look of dreary distaste upon the house she was about to re-enter alone.

"What *am* I to do with myself now?" she said, mournfully. And then she remembered how, among other pieces of advice, her mother had bidden her strive to "seem cheerfully companionable to her husband always." And she laughed bitterly at the recollection of the claptrap counsel and its utter inutility. Royston Hall was a far grander home than she had ever known

before, but it was pervaded by an atmosphere to which she was not yet acclimatized.

Her husband came in about an hour after the carriage had rolled out of sight, leaving Mrs. James to make solitary lamentations. But even when he did come in, he declined to notice or in any way sympathize with her affliction at the departure of her friend. Something had gone wrong on the farm—a bullock had choked itself with a bit of turnip—or a promising colt had impaled itself on a stake fence—or something had occurred which gave Mr. Selwyn James food for serious reflection, and led him to repress anything like confidence on the part of his wife.

“Has anything happened to put you out, Selwyn?” she asked, when three or four very heavy sighs which she had heaved had passed unnoticed by him.

“Happened! what should have happened?”

“I didn’t know: you seemed annoyed.”

She rose from her chair as she said it, with the intention of going over to him as he sat turning over the daily papers, and trying to win him to a softer bearing. But he gave the *Times* a sharp warning crack as she approached, and so she stayed the hand that she had been about to put upon his shoulder.

“What are you going to do this afternoon, Alice?” he asked presently, looking up at her.

“Nothing—unless you’ll take me out with you.”

“I can’t do that,” he answered, indifferently; “but I can find you employment. Drive into Cambridge, and just pull up at Phillips’s, and tell him I want him to come over here to-morrow and put the young grey in the break.”

“The grey! I thought Conway wanted him for a hack?” she said, hoping by this expression of knowledge and assumption of interest to induce him to enlarge upon the subject, in fact hoping to make him talk to her, no matter about what.

But he held that to put himself out to amuse his wife when he had something else to do was a mere waste of time. So he merely replied—

"I want Phillips to come to-morrow. If you would rather not go, I can send a boy."

"I may as well go there as anywhere else. I've nothing to do, and no one to speak to," she said, checking a sigh.

"That's rather a boon sometimes, isn't it?" he answered, carelessly. "Well, you may drive into Cambridge now—that will be a nice change for you."

He really meant it kindly enough. He could not understand how this apparently low estimate of her deserts galled and chafed her.

"A nice change," she repeated, mockingly; "do you think that I've been used to such monotony all my life, that a dull drive in a close carriage by myself is to be regarded as an exciting and exhilarating change by me?"

"Don't be childish! you needn't go unless you like."

"Then I don't like," she retorted, defiantly; and then she went away hurriedly out of the room, in order that her suddenly-asserted dignity might not be compromised by the tears that were in her eyes showering down before him.

"I haven't the remotest conception what it is that she wants!" he said to himself, as he walked out slowly into the yard—deliberating, as he went, whether he should ride in and speak to Phillips himself, or send a helper. And he spoke the truth!—he had not the remotest conception that she was pining, yearning, hungering for tender tones and looks of love. He thought her line of conduct petulant and silly—not deserving of serious notice, but certainly not worthy the pursuance of the wife of a man like himself.

He had gained the stables before his deliberation as to what he should do about the grey had resulted in a decision. The sight of the grey itself led out for exercise helped him to one immediately. "I'll ride in at once and speak to Phillips about him myself," he thought; "he'll turn out something wonderful! There's action!"

The grey was a very grand stepper, all untaught as he was. Such a showy goer in colthood deserved his destiny. He was to be driven in a cabriolet in the Park

during the ensuing season. In the contemplation of his young horse's charms, Mr. James forgot his young wife's culpability.

Alice, meanwhile, had gone up to her room—where she sat eagerly listening, for at least ten minutes, for a sign of forgetfulness of her great offence from her husband. "If he would only come out into the hall whistling," she thought, "I should know that he wasn't very cross; and I would just run and speak to him, and tell him that I would go with pleasure." She little knew that her lapse from amiability only lived in his memory as the error of a naughty child might have done. He was resolved to punish her—but he had nearly forgotten what for by this time.

At the expiration of the penitential ten minutes remorse went by for a time, and Alice recovered her sense of its being generally dull, and her desire to do something that should dissipate the dullness. "He has gone somewhere, and has not chosen to tell me," she thought. "I'll go and see Dora, and not say a word about it to him."

The young wife, about to deceive her husband for the first time, made her preparations towards it with quite a *piquant* sense of pleasure. In itself, her contemplated proceeding was harmless enough; but she experienced some of the delicious sensations of wrong-doing. Had he not set his face so sternly against it, her desire for Dora's society would never have become the craving thing it was now. She dressed herself for her visit to Mrs. Burroughes with the care and taste—and the triumphant joy at the result of that care and taste being pleasing—which a girl displays in the toilette that is to meet her lover's eye. Her heart beat as she stepped into the brougham and gave the order—"To The Oaks." She was planning to go and enjoy herself in any fashion that might be prevailing at the moment at that far from rigorous house. If Mr. Wynne was there, he should see that she had not forgotten his subtle delineation of vulgar buffoons and stammering idiots. She would take the tone her cousin took with the men who might be

present;—since Selwyn was unkind and disagreeable for nothing, who could blame her if she gave him something to be cross and disagreeable about?

These were the thoughts that lightened the first portion of the drive to The Oaks. But before the carriage stopped at her cousin's door she regretted that she had given the order to her servants. But repentance came too late!—the door was opened in answer to the clanging bell, and—"Mrs. Burroughes was at home." She went into her cousin's presence with her heart very low indeed.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE FORGOTTEN LETTER.

DESPITE the command that had been issued to the contrary, there was not a face at The Chase that did not grow brighter when Charlie appeared amongst them again. 'Don't be angry with me for coming home, papa. I should have gone out of my mind about her,' she said to her father, whom she met on the stairs when she was running up to Madge's room. And he gave her no word of anger in return, but just kissed her anxious-looking brow and muttered—"My poor girl! my poor girl!" and hurried along out of the way of the sound of the moanings of delirium that came out from the chamber of sickness.

Drummon Cleeve was nearly taken away from the unceasing contemplation of himself by this terrible illness of his daughter. Nearly—but not quite. He carried his self-abnegation to the pitch of not being irate at the regularity with which his meals were served to him—for Miss Cleeve had been emphatically the "head" of the house. And now the head was deranged, many things went wrong. But he could not carry it to the point of bearing to hear her cries or to see her anguish.

Just before Charlie's advent the fever had raged so fiercely that Mrs. Cleeve in alarm had insisted on her husband's presence in his daughter's room. Madge had raved like a maniac, and burnt like a living coal; and her stepmother had sobbingly declared that "her hour was come." But the nurse knew better, she knew that when the fever was so strong the life was strong also; and the hastily-summoned doctor when he came corroborated the nurse's statement, and released Mr. Cleeve from his enforced attendance.

It was about nine o'clock on the evening of the 9th of March when Charlie reached The Chase, worn out with hasty travel and acute anxiety. All the old love—all the intense sisterly desire to serve and relieve Madge if possible—came to her heart and reanimated her spirit as she bent tremblingly over the bed on which Miss Cleeve was tossing and moaning. "Let me tend her to-night, nurse," she whispered, pleadingly, to the hard-featured, soft-hearted, west-country woman who had been got up from the village to bear the brunt of the fever-stricken. "You go into the dressing-room, I can call you in a moment if I want you; but let me tend her to-night."

"Doant 'ee ask to do it to-night, my dear," the nurse answered, with a broad excruciating accent, but a sympathetic inflection of voice; "doant 'ee want to sit up to-night, Miss—poor dearie, tired as you be. I says to Mrs. Cleeve, half an hour before you come, says I, if Miss Charlie was here, I says, she'd be wanting to sit up with me, I says, 'which she must not even if she were, nurse,' she says to me, 'leastways not a night;' for there'll be watching enough wanted by day for many a day to come, poor heart," the woman continued, tenderly striving to adjust the agonized young head that had been so clear and strong, more comfortably on the pillow.

A good portion of the night of the 9th wore itself away, and still Charlie Cleeve remained sunk in a torpor of fatigue by her sister's side. Then the nurse came and roused her gently, and whispered that she would be of

use on the morrow—if she desired to keep herself ready for any service that might be required of her in the dreary days to come before the crisis, she must go and take that proper rest which nature craved.

“Have me called early in the morning, that I may come and take my share of watching, nurse,” she said. And the nurse nodded an assent, and at the same time mentally swore that she would leave no art untried to keep that sleep which might save “Miss Charlie from breaking down” unbroken.

She went away to her own room and sobbed herself to sleep with sorrow and fatigue. She knew little of illness, but intuitively she felt that this was a very serious one that had befallen Madge. And her last waking thought was one of poignant grief that there had been coldness between that helpless suffering sister and herself of late.

“Oh, my poor darling! if loving care will bring you out of it, that care shall not be lacking,” she murmured mournfully. And then she sank into one of those deep deep sleeps which are like death, inasmuch as while in them the “wicked cease from troubling, and the weary are at rest.”

It had been late on the night of the 9th, or rather early on the morning of Thursday the 10th of March, when this balmy blessing of profound slumber fell upon Charlie. And as a hint the kind-hearted nurse had given to the housemaid who came to do up the grate in the sick-room had been attended to religiously, she (Charlie) had been suffered to repose undisturbed till past mid-day.

Even she acknowledged that the time had not been wasted, and that the rest had been sorely needed. She felt calculated to endure any amount of watching and waiting on Madge now. She came to the task cool and collected, and, so the nurse allowed, perfectly fitted for it. It was one when she entered upon her occupation; at two Madge was to be given a draught by the doctor, who would then leave her for some hours to a careful unceasing watch. After that draught absolute silence,

unbroken quiet, must be maintained in the room lest the patient be roused to her danger—to a death human skill would be powerless to avert.

Charlie learnt these truths from the lips of the nurse during the hour that intervened between her entrance and that of the doctor with the opiate. After that there was a brief relapse from absolute stillness when he came in. He impressed afresh upon Charlie the necessity there would be for undisturbed rest being assured to Miss Cleeve, from the moment she had swallowed the draught until the expiration of some hours. "I think I can trust you to watch your sister," he continued; "in fact, I feel sure that I can rely upon your unrelaxing affection, prudence, and self-control. If she appears restless, beware of a sound that may aggravate that restlessness. But if she opens her eyes or tries to raise herself, call the nurse and send for me. The nurse shall sit in the adjoining room, and I will be here again at six. Get some eau-de-Cologne and saturate your handkerchief."

She silently obeyed his behest, and with careful footsteps crossed the room to look for the perfume in a drawer in which she knew Madge was wont to keep it. Lying in that drawer, amid a heap of scent-bottles, and handkerchiefs, and bracelets, and other feminine litter, she saw a letter addressed to herself. And with a hastily-checked exclamation of surprise, she seized and opened it.

One glance showed her that it was from Victor, and a flood of anger at a letter from him being kept back surged across her soul. The next moment her glance fell on her sister, who was ill unto death perhaps, and a great rush of love and pity swept the anger away.

She went back to the side of the bed and laid the letter upon it for future perusal. And then the draught was given, and after a few more cautions, the nurse and doctor left her to her loving guard.

"I have the fullest confidence in you," he whispered; "for God's sake deserve it, and your sister will be spared." And she vowed to God to do so.

When they were replacing Madge on the pillow after giving her the draught, Charlie had taken her sister's hand in hers, and poor Madge's wasted, burning fingers had closed round it like a vice. And so the watcher and the watched remained closely linked together, and there was not a sound in the partially-darkened room, save the deep, oppressed breathing of the girl, to disturb whom would be to destroy.

For a time Charlie looked at nothing but her sister, and marked and mourned over the beauty that had been so bright, now routed, as it were, from its stronghold. Flushed as the cheek which indented the pillow was, the hollows in it and the lack of young bloom upon it, were clearly perceptible. And there were delicately-drawn lines under the large sunken eyes, that are always sad to look upon in a young girl's face; they will so surely develope into wrinkles soon.

The glorious hair, richly brown in the shade, and tinted with the glory of red gold in the light, had all been cut off and thinned, and it lay now upon the pillow short and spare, like a boy's. But this charm, of which disease had temporarily defrauded her, would come back again, Charlie reflected. And then she further reflected, with a stifled sigh, that there were some things that would never come back, amongst others the old undoubted tenderness that had existed between them before they came to The Chase—before they knew Sir Victor Cleeve.

She rather cherished the thought of him which had arisen. She fondled it, as it were, keeping it in her mind to beguile the weariness of this period of watching. She called to remembrance how she had seen him first when he had deemed him a boy, and felt disappointed thereat. And she recalled those numerous—not to be reproduced or analyzed—minute traits of character and conduct which had discovered to her that he was ceasing from boyish things, and learning to think, and act, and feel like a man. It was a pleasant spot on which to tent and pasture in the desert of thought—this young, brilliant, bright being whom the rays of nature and fortune had so

thickly gilded. So she dwelt on him for a time, in a deep silence of loving pleasure—and hoped and prayed in a passionate paroxysm of hope and prayer that she was scarcely conscious of, that his future might be brilliant and bright as he himself was.

Then her eyes glanced with a shy, dancing tenderness towards the open letter that she had refrained from reading when she had taken it first from the drawer, because the eyes of both nurse and doctor had been bent upon her, and she desired to read Victor's first letter to her unobserved.

Victor's first letter! A hope that it might not be the last would rise to her mind—and then a wild longing to read it took possession of her soul, and cast out the self-denial which had caused her outwardly to disregard its claims on her attention before.

It was written on soft, foreign paper, and it was lying open on the bed. From her seat on the low chair by Madge's side she could bend forward near enough to decipher it, without moving the arm or shoulder even which could communicate a thrill to Madge through the linking together of their hands. She well assured herself that her movement would not disturb Madge before she bent forward to read her letter. And when she had thus assured herself, she inclined towards it—nearer, nearer, with the soft, rosy light of a new-born love flooding her brow even in that darkened chamber, and commenced reading Victor's letter.

CHAPTER XIX.

AT ALDERSHOTT.

THE date of the first letter from the one loved is not wont to be severely scanned. Miss Charlie Cleeve skipped the date and address, written in one line on the wide foreign paper, and commenced at the address to herself. Her eyes ran rapidly over the first portion of the page, and then they went up with a startled, bewil-

dered look to the date at the top. This—the day on which she was reading it—was the 10th, and that letter had been penned and posted on the 3rd of March. She took this truth—this knowledge of the many days that had elapsed since she ought to have received it—to her heart; and then she put her left hand out stealthily and turned the page of the soft, unrustling foreign paper, and read the letter to its close. And a tempest tossed her soul as she read—and still her hand rested untrembling in Madge's clinging clasp.

She was a girl of a strong mind and a prompt habit of thought. She reviewed possibilities quickly, and, darting a sharp look at the timepiece on the dressing-table, she told herself that if Madge woke naturally in an hour all might yet be well—Victor might still be saved from the fate his letter told her he was about to rush upon. “Papa can take the train here at six and be in town by five in the morning; and then he'll reach Aldershott before eight!” she thought. And then, as the minutes crept by and Madge gave no sign of awakening, Charlie's mind tottered under the influence of impatience, and she asked herself, “Would it not be but right to risk doing a little harm to Madge for the sake of securing the mighty good of her father's intervention to Victor?” And then a burst of repentant affection for Madge supervened, and she upbraided herself fiercely, but silently, noiselessly, untremblingly still—for harbouring a thought for an instant that might imperil that “absolute quiet” which the doctor had told her that it behoved a watcher by that couch to maintain. If the nurse would only come into the room, by noiseless signs and a whispered word, and a look of such mute eloquence as the occasion might well call forth, she could make the woman understand that the letter must be conveyed to her father at once—and with it in his hands he surely could not be doubtful as to what he ought to do. “At any cost, Victor should be saved from this thing!” she thought; and then the tears rushed from her eyes, and her soul sank and died within her, as the prospect of so saving him decreased. A hundred times during those weary hours

of watching did the resolution take her to release her sister's hand as gently as she might, and seek her father's presence with that letter in her hand, and beseech him to save Victor while yet there was time. And a hundred times did the doctor's awful words of warning ring in her ears, and save her from putting her design into execution. "I can only pray to God to wake you up refreshed sooner than we intended, dear!" she thought. And then she constrained herself strongly to wait—wait—wait—without a movement that should hasten that waking.

And it came not! The hours crept by—the ruin that Victor was about to bring upon himself became more apparent to her every moment, and still the waking that might enable her to act for his salvation with effect came not. Madge slumbered on, in the deep unbroken slumber that they had prayed might be granted to her. And Charlie sat by, motionless, but with a fire in her veins, and with her heart beating with a terrible velocity, praying now that those slumbers might cease the very moment they had brought the good they were intended to work.

And still the minutes passed and the waking came not! Oh! poor unconscious Madge, battling in sleep for the young life you had nearly wrecked, had a gleam of the danger he was in been given you, you would have burst the bonds that opiate bound you in, and cried aloud to save him at this last hour, though such rebellion of nature had cost you your life. But no gleam of the truth—no prophetic warning came to the mind that was steeped in artificial oblivion. And so the minutes passed away and lengthened into hours, and Charlie watched and prayed, and waited wildly for the waking that came not.

The tightened clasp her sister had taken of the hand she had been holding when the soothing opiate was given had never once relaxed, and Charlie, though every nerve was throbbing for release from that clasp, had never essayed to relax it. But though she remained thus passive, there was a maddened impatience—the light of a frantic desire to be away and doing—in the eyes that travelled with an anguished restlessness from the timepiece to the

silvery-hued paper on which the news that cut her so seemed graven in characters of fire.

And now the broad hand touched the five, and the minute hand passed with a jerk over the twelve, and yet there was time "if she only wakes and I get papa away at once!" Charlie thought. And still the waking came not, and the minutes passed, and the chance of compassing his salvation from this something Victor had confessed, grew more remote.

She was a clear-headed girl, and she knew perfectly well that anxiety and impatience would be futile ere long. If her father could leave The Chase at twenty minutes, or even a quarter to six, he could catch the six-up train; if he could not, exertion would be useless, for no telegram would have the power to avert that deed of the morrow which, if suffered to take place, might darken Victor's life. She knew this—she was not a woman to sob and sigh, and say, take a train, when no train could be taken. After twenty minutes to six, if Madge did not awake no lifeboat could put out from The Chase between the sea of destruction towards which he was drifting and Sir Victor Cleeve.

She would not suffer herself to dwell upon the thought that this helplessness was Madge's work. The erring and unhappy sister who lay upon the bed before her, was safe from all harsh judgment from her. But she did indignantly blame the guardianship that had been rigorous when it might have been lenient, as in the matter of Ailce Lisle—and that had relaxed to the extent of exercising no sort of supervision over the generous impulses that the wary had been so prompt to play upon when he had gone forth into the miniature wicked world of Aldershatt.

Again and again she read the letter that was resting there open before her. She read there of a confession of a contemplated deed that might turn out to be a woful folly, which was to be perpetrated on Friday, March the eleventh. "Nothing could turn me from my purpose," Victor wrote, "for I feel that honour and humanity compel me to the performance of it. No one has a right to thwart me, as you told me once, dear

Charlie, when the thing I desire to do is simply right. But one has the power who would not scruple to use it. Therefore, though I could not take this step without informing you, who have ever been gentle and loving to me, of it, I tell it to you in a confidence that I charge you not to break."

She was not a girl to disregard such an appeal to her honour unless she saw good cause, but she had not the smallest scruple about disregarding it now. It was out of no selfish love that she prayed for the moment of Madge's awakening, in order that she (Charlie) might then be free to seek her father and disobey Victor by showing Drummond Cleeve—the baronet's guardian—Victor's letter. She knew her cousin too well not to read the letter aright. She read misery therein—a misery that would crop up, despite his endeavours to keep it under. She read that a distorted or rather a magnified sense of duty and feeling of honour had led him on to the course of action detailed in this epistle, which, had she but received it in due time, she would have used without hesitation for his good. But she had not received it in due time, and now the precious moments were ebbing away, and the stillness of the room remained unbroken save by the breathing of the sleeping girl, and the minute hand crept along with a cruel speed; and the waking that would enable her to seek her father and speed him off to Victor's side, came not.

The opiate was doing its work thoroughly. It was with more a mute groan than a sigh that Charlie Cleeve marked the hand of the clock point the quarter to six, and the hand of her sister maintain its clinging clasp.

The time for saving him was gone!

When Captain Conway James had conveyed Victor Cleeve to Aldershott, seen him deposited in comfortable rooms at the hotel at which the *élite* of that portion of our gallant army in camp most do congregate, and given him the freedom of his own black hut, he conceived that he had fulfilled to the letter the obligations he was under to please the young lady with whom he had flirted during

his brief sojourn in the little Devonshire village. Miss Cleeve had indicated to the courteous young soldier that she would deem it a pleasing variation to her cousin's life, if he could spend a short time at Aldershott. And under the exciting influence of a gallop that she was dancing remarkably well, he promised her that such an opportunity should be afforded to Sir Victor. He fulfilled his promise, invited Victor, and now that he had conveyed him hither he felt that he had kept his word as it behoved a gentleman to do, and that he was assailed from all further care and consideration about Sir Victor Cleeve.

Conway James had a habit of running up by the mid-day train to town and coming back by a late at night one, for he had many interests in life, and they were nearly all centred in London. The perpetual presence of Sir Victor at his right hand would have been a bane and a bore to him; therefore he took effectual steps towards ridding himself of that perpetual presence as soon as possible, and in a very graceful manner.

He consigned Sir Victor to the companionship of a lot of men whom he designated rather sweepingly as the "nicest fellows in the camp;" and he counselled these to leave nothing undone to render the period of young Cleeve's sojourn amongst them pleasant: "He's a fellow who would like to return it, and he can return it well, you know," he said, in relation to the baronet; "and look here—don't let him into any confounded scrape, for he's younger than he looks."

Lieutenant Ogilvie, the man to whom Conway James specially directed this caution, was not much older than Victor himself; but, as he would have said, "he had lived faster, by Jove! and knew more of the world"—that is, of the worst of its ways, than the young baronet had yet acquired. Claude Ogilvie, without being poetically disposed generally, sighed for just two lines of Byron to be applied to him; to be described as being in "years a boy, in mind a slave to every vicious joy," would have been a proud result that he was willing to spare no pains to attain. So people seeing him thus

anxious to be dubbed it, deemed him less vicious than he was, and underrated his claims to pettifogging profligacy and success in low intrigue.

Captain Conway James especially underrated them. He thought Claude, or the Baby, as they called him in the corps, a handsome young fool who had mistaken his *métier*, and set up as a fast man without sufficient cause. "The women have petted the boy because he's so pretty," he was wont to say; "they're safe in spoiling an Adonis who gives his young beard a wave with the curling tongs. Claude's a nice fellow, with not an atom of harm in him; if he had he wouldn't strive so laboriously to make it come out."

So the young subaltern with the yellow beard, and the guileless mind, and the handsome face that women liked, was elected to the post of companion-in-chief to the baronet, who had the power and will to return any attention lavished upon him now so well and richly in the future. During the earlier days of Sir Victor's stay in the camp he saw, as has been said, but little of Captain Conway James by reason of that gentleman's almost daily trips to town; and so, being cast very much upon Claude, the thing called friendship sprang up between them.

Sir Victor had brought a couple of horses and a groom with him, and both these horses far surpassed anything Claude Ogilvie had been able to achieve in that way; so he rode one of them constantly in the most friendly spirit, and persuaded his new acquaintance to cancel utterly the services of his groom as an attendant.

His title and wealth, and the name his father had had, as well as his own good looks, and that mingling of strength and gentleness in his manner which invariably appeals to women, brought him quickly into notice in such society as there was. Unfortunately, it happened that the few officers' wives who were resident and "receiving" at the time were women going on well towards the grand climacteric, who did it out of duty, not pleasure. Their *réunions* were unfrequent and ungenial, and it was small wonder that Sir Victor acquiesced one night

when Claude Ogilvie whispered to him, after an hour's patient endurance, "Can't we cut this, and go to the theatre?"

There had been before Victor's advent a perfect *furor* in the camp amongst all grades for theatricals, which were managed in this way: the "men" took the male parts, and the female parts were filled by unknown professional actresses glad of an engagement anywhere. The mania for acting had been on the decrease lately, but it was revived again now with something of the old enthusiasm by reason of the arrival of a company of strollers who had located themselves in the town, and made overtures of their services to the camp.

There was no room for much scenery in the theatre. They, unluckily, were debarred by lack of space from putting their faith in a waterfall, or a mountain-torrent, big enough for a boat and a murder, and a duck-gun to explode with safety to the audience. Consequently there was little to distract the attention from the figure that occupied the central position on the stage when Sir Victor and Claude Ogilvie entered.

This central figure was that of a woman who, by dint of much waving with a pair of massive rounded white arms, and by aid of a laxity of attire and a good deal of tinsel, was illustrating dramatically Cleopatra's love and passionate impatience.

This exponent of the Shakesperian drama was a tall, slight, dark woman, with eyes as large and brown as a calf's, and the size and splendour of them was increased by the deep darkness of the region round about and beneath them; they were huge, magnificent, absorbing, haunting eyes, in fact, and they beamed out from the dusky beauty of her face like two rays of glory.

At the distance from the stage at which Sir Victor sat, it was impossible for him to see whether this beauty was the result of perfection of feature or merely of expression—the nose that is an unintelligible snub may be raised by a judicious dab of white into the straight or aquiline at stage distance. His brief experience in Paris under his father's auspices had taught him some of the secrets

of "make up;" but about her general beauty there could be little mistake, and about her eyes and arms none at all.

Her passion for Antony did not impress him very much. She could not rise to it, in fact, without ranting.

"She's more at home in light comedy," Claude Ogilvie whispered critically. "See her in light comedy, by Jove! and then talk about her not being able to act!"

"You've seen her before, then?" Victor asked. "Who is she? What's her name? Where did you see her?"

"Her name is—a—I forget. Oh! here it is in the bill. Yes, I've seen her before," he continued, hesitatingly, "in light comedy." It had been in a light comedy that had bidden fair to have a melo-dramatic termination for the Baby, that in which he had seen the beauty with the haunting eyes.

"Lucille Michel," Victor read from the playbill. "Is she a Frenchwoman?"

"No—I don't know—I mean—French blood in her veins, I believe," Claude answered, rather absently. "I'm just going behind to speak to her," he continued; "perhaps, by-and-by, if she'll let me, I may introduce you."

And the young baronet, possessor of a name that was old, and of an estate that was large even in that county of ancient lineages and large estates, looked inexpressibly gratified at the prospect of an introduction to a strolling actress who was rendering the Serpent of Old Nile in tarnished tinsel and cotton velvet.

Lieutenant Claude Ogilvie went behind the scenes on the conclusion of the second act, and he remained there till the play was over. In the meantime Sir Victor had been reduced to the dead level of his own thoughts, undisturbed whenever Lucille was off the boards, for the amateur exploits of the military histrionics were not engrossing.

Claude came round to him when they were getting through the tag. "I've obtained permission from Miss Michel to introduce you to her," he said, looking at his watch: "but as I'm due at Hanway's quarters at eleven, I shall have to leave you directly."

"Oh! any other time will do," Sir Victor replied.

The waving white arms and the haunting eyes had been pleasant to look upon, but he had no ungovernable desire to become acquainted with their possessor.

"Any other time, by Jove! I wish Lucille could hear you," the Baby answered, laughing; "as a rule that sort of thing's all right enough, but she's gently born and devilish proud."

The Baby turned his half-closed, long blue eyes on his companion as he spoke. They were now at the door of the green-room and the light fell upon Victor's face, showing that it kindled slightly at this appeal to his *esprit de corps*. There was a good deal of truth in the metrical declaration of the "Punch" swell in relation to the great disputed marriage case—

"I do admire the fellow's pluck,
Who—deeming manufacturers mud—
Owns he don't pay the common ruck
The same respect as gentle blood!"

The beauty of Miss Michel's massive arms was concealed by an all-pervading waterproof paletot when they opened the door and came into her presence. But her head was uncovered still; and an uncommonly handsome head it was, with its masses of black hair bound loosely but somewhat classically around it.

She was standing a little apart from a group of officers who had been acting, and professionals who had been putting them through the performance. For of the company whose advent in Aldershott had temporarily revived the nearly extinct passion for the drama, Lucille alone had taken an active part.

She was taking no part in the conversation which was being carried on actively around her, and which consisted mainly of excited inquiries as to how the costume of each one had looked in the pose he had deemed his special point. Unquestionably Victor thought she was not the conventional type of strolling actress, and his own gentle blood seethed at the idea of this fellow-possessor of the fluid being condemned to an existence so uncongenial to her order through stress of fate.

She responded to the introduction Lieutenant Claude

Ogilvie gave Sir Victor Cleeve in a quiet, self-possessed manner that expressed nothing but the meagre joy permissible on such occasions; and then, while Victor was congratulating her on her performance, she put on her bonnet, and, with an apologetic smile for the interruption, regretted aloud to Claude that mamma had not come to fetch her.

The gay dragoon—the handsome yellow-bearded Baby—regretted it also—cordially! He then frankly appended a neatly turned sentence of sorrow on his own inability to offer her his escort home, he being due on service at Hanway's at eleven. And when the Baby enunciated these sentiments Miss Michel's large dark eyes flamed out upon him as they had not done during the wildest of her rage for Antony.

Sir Victor Cleeve did not see the flaming commentary, but he heard the words that called it forth. In no spirit of idle gallantry—with no desire to get spoken about as an idle young man of fashion magnificently free with his attentions to women of an inferior class—did he hasten to deliver her from her apparent dilemma.

"You are disappointed of your proper escort," he said; "will you do me the honour of allowing me to accompany you to your door; it is impossible that you can go away alone."

She thanked him very quietly and simply. "My uncle is here," she said, "or was a minute or two ago. Of course if he has not gone, thinking that, as usual, mamma will come for me, I can make him take me home. If he is gone, though, I shall accept your offer gratefully."

She brought her fine eyes to bear upon him through the spotted veil in which she had tied her face up, and he felt that it was a great pity that one so young, so fair, &c., &c. In fact, like many an other unvitiated chivalrous young fool, he "thought a fair and guileless face might also mean the soul was fair."

It was distressing in the extreme! Her uncle, Mr. Blackman, the respected manager of the company to which she belonged, was gone. But there was no help

for it. So she put on the goloshes of humble, modest pedestrianism, and placed the hand that had been inflexible in purpose in the asp business with maidenly trembling reserve on the young baronet's arm.

As the pair walked away through the camp in the direction of the town, the door of the closet that had been used as Miss Michel's dressing-room opened, and an elderly woman in a bonnet and shawl,⁹ and a little leather bag on her arm, came forth laughing.

"I must make haste after them, and catch them up at the door, or I shall be having black looks from Lucy," she said. "You should have walked with them; it would have been better, Mr. Claude."

"Not a bit of it," the Baby replied; "and you take my advice, be as discreet as you like, but compromise him. He is a chevalier *sans peur, sans reproche*, and he'll treat Lucille like a queen, regarding her in the light I've thrown around her."

Miss Michel's mamma—known to the thoughtless world as Mrs. Mitchell—closed her bag with an angry snap.

"Well," she said, "we've agreed that bygones shall be bygones, but it's more than the best of your friends can say for you that you've been without reproach, Master Claude. I'm sure the misery you've caused that poor child, none can tell."

Claude laughed quietly. This woman had been very terrible to him once—back in the days when Lucille and himself had been cast in the same light comedy. But now she was terrible no longer, for Lucille was ambitious, and he was the friend of Sir Victor Cleeve.

"You'd better follow them now," he remarked, "or Lucille will give you a taste of that angelic temper you used to talk so much about to me, Mrs. Mitchell;" and then he strolled away to keep his appointment with Hanway, and the mother—the vigilant parent—went off at a hand-gallop after her darling.

It was a cold, sloppy January night, and the drizzle drifted into the faces of the young pair and did away with the possibility of much conversation. Sir Victor

began to wish that he had "borrowed some fellow's trap to drive her home in," his sympathies were so acute for the well-born lady condemned to rough it!

When they reached the door of the house in which she was lodging with her mamma, Miss Michel betrayed a momentary embarrassment.

"I should like to ask you in," she said, "in order that you might hear from mamma how it came about that I have been compelled to accept what you so kindly offered to-night; but I feel that I had better not. Aldershott is an unkind place."

She said these words very quietly, with a tone of something like sorrow for the narrowness of judgment Aldershott might possibly betray. And by the rays of the lamp that streamed through the fan-light over the door he saw that her eyes looked more limpid than they had done before.

"Be assured," he said rather fervently, "that no one shall question the honour that you have done me."

And then she held her hand out to him, and breathed a farewell in the warmest and most friendly spirit.

"I can only hope that mamma will have an opportunity of thanking you for your kindness to me," she was saying, when a lady burst upon their view from the darkness of the street, with many gasps, and a black leather bag upon her arm.

"Lucille!—my child!—is it you?" she asked, sternly repressing her gasps in order to hear the answer of the apostrophized. And when Lucille had assured her parent of her identity, and Mrs. Mitchell had asserted first that she should never forgive herself for having gone to the theatre too late, and next that she should never forgive Lucille for having come away from the theatre so early, the estimable woman and inestimable mother entreated Sir Victor Cleve to walk in.

"That I may thank you on that hearth—" she was commencing, but Lucille pushed her, and she checked herself, and precipitately led the way into that 'umble and 'appy home which she was about, but for her daughter's caution, to assure him he had assisted to maintain in all its integrity.

The appearance of the home into which "half drew she him, half fell he in," was aught but prepossessing. Lodgings at a guinea a-week never are prepossessing; in fact, they are generally repulsive; and these in which Mrs. Mitchell and the beautiful scion of some ancient stock, her daughter, had planted themselves, were no exceptions to the rule. The only thing at which it was agreeable to gaze in the room was the fire. That was brightly cheery, and from before it went up an odour of toasted cheese and roasted potatoes.

"It is so impossible to get anything to eat here," Miss Michel said, glancing superciliously down at the viands which were awaiting them. And Mrs. Mitchell took the hint conveyed in her daughter's tones, and abstained from producing sundry delicate little additions to the feast in the shape of sausages, Bass's ale, &c., which she had purchased and held concealed in her little black bag.

Sir Victor Cleeve sat with the ladies in their loathsome little lodging for about half-an-hour, and during that time he heard several little facts relating to his friend Lieutenant Claude Ogilvie, which his intimate acquaintance with that young gentleman had not discovered to him yet.

"There are a many—is a many, I mean—which makes more pretensions without half the goodness of that young man," Mrs. Mitchell opined.

And Lucille, after discharging the order "silence" at her mother with her big brown eyes, said softly—

"Poor Claude! we knew him very well at Woolwich; perhaps he may have told you about it?"

"He told me he knew you," Victor said; "that is all."

"Ah! such a nice—boy," she was going to say, and then she remembered that Claude had told her that Sir Victor was younger than himself; so she checked herself adroitly, and went on—"good-hearted fellow, as men call it, Claude is—he's such a pet of mamma's. I believe if mamma had been younger they would have made a match of it."

The phrase was not an elegant one from the lips of a decayed gentlewoman, but she wanted to indicate that Claude had been an unsuccessful aspirant to her hand without telling a downright story. While she confined herself to inuendo Claude would not peach.

As soon as Sir Victor betrayed signs of restlessness, and gave symptoms of going, Mrs. Mitchell dashed into the part of the British matron with vigour; she had learnt a good many sharp lessons in life—amongst others, that it is well to tread on one's own corns if they must be trodden upon at all.

"As a mother, Sir Victor Cleeve," she began solemnly, "I feel I must do violence to those feelings of hospitality which were the rarest ornament of the station in which I was brought up. The hour is late, my child."

"Mamma very wisely thinks it better that we should detain you here no longer," Miss Lucille said; and then she added in a lower tone, "you will not take offence with her for her candour and her care of me."

"Do you know, mother," Lucille said when he was gone, and they were renovating exhausted nature with the repudiated cheese and ale, "I think the less you talk before him the better. *Look!*—you do that capitally, and I'm glad you didn't take an engagement here, or he'd find out that such looks can be put on."

CHAPTER XX.

FRIENDSHIP IS AN EMPTY SOUND.

SIR VICTOR CLEEVE detailed to his friend Claude Ogilvie when the latter came down to the hotel the following morning, some of the incidents consequent on that introduction which the Baby had given the previous night.

"Her mother seemed terribly annoyed at having missed her," he said.

And Claude answered

"No doubt, she was," with a quiet laugh in his eyes.

"Oh yes, I could see she was savage," Victor went on; "Miss Lucille tried to make her understand that I was your friend——"

"The devil! they're not going on that basis, are they?" Claude interrogated angrily; and then he remembered something apparently, for he added,

"Oh! I'll tell the old lady that it's all right—if you care to know more about them, that is; they're delightful people, uncommonly delightful, and Lucille is a most ladylike, charming girl."

He half closed his large blue eyes as he said it, and watched the frank-faced, lion-looking baronet whom he was despising for his ready belief. The Baby remembered the time when he had been nearly as unsophisticated himself—a time not so very long past but that he could easily recal it. He remembered how he had nearly fallen a victim to the delightful people, and what a determined fury the lady-like Lucille had shown herself when he slipped the noose they had him in. He also remembered certain unconsidered paragraphs of passion which he had indited, paragraphs he couldn't quite recal, but which Miss Lucille assured him contained more than one promise. He remembered all these things, and felt that if they would accept the sacrifices he was ready to offer them, no consideration of friendship should stay the hand with which he would urge Sir Victor on to the gulf he had but just balked himself.

Sir Victor Cleeve was but moderately interested in the handsome Lucille up to this juncture. He liked her for the candid gratitude she had displayed for his little act of attention. He liked her for the unassuming modest reserve which had marked her bearing towards him during that solitary walk home, and again in her mother's presence. But he was not profoundly interested in Claude Ogilvie's old friend as yet.

"Yes, she seemed all that," he said, in answer to his friend's assertion of her being an extremely "lady-like girl." "But isn't her mother rather——?"

"Rather what?" Claude interrupted.

"Well; rather queer for her mother!"

Murmurs had come up from the West relating to Sir Victor's own parentage, and all idly as they had floated over the Baby's ear, he recalled them to his memory now in Lucille's service.

"By Jove! I call that unjust, Cleeve," he said with an assumption of great warmth; "the real state of the case is evident enough, I should imagine. Mrs. Michel has been raised from the ranks likely enough, but her commission's good, and Lucille is quite right to stick to her mother."

Sir Victor felt nettled at being had up for a lack of courtesy by the Baby, who was not wont to display too much of it to the world.

"I only meant that she seemed inferior to Miss Michel in manner and education. I didn't impugn her worthiness or right to the commission—not a very lofty one by the way—which she holds now. I thought the daughter charming,—I can't say I thought the same of the mother."

"The daughter takes after the sire," the Baby said; "And it's just as well that she does, I allow; at the same time I assure you I've the greatest possible respect for Mrs. Michel. Did she tell you how fond she was of me?"

"Her daughter told me. Was her father alive when you knew them first?"

The Baby had a slight rapidly subdued inward convulsion—the allusion to Lucille's papa seemed a humorous thing to the family friend of the Michels.

"No," he replied, after a moment's pause; "they had the misfortune to lose him some time before I made their acquaintance. He was under Government, a man of first-rate family, and no end of talent."

"Poor girl!" Victor said, compassionately; "deuced hard, isn't it, that the child of such a man, who probably lost his life in the service of his country, should have been driven down to this. Good Lord! it's horrible. I

wonder if Conway James couldn't get her an engagement on the London boards?"

"No," the Baby said sternly.

"Why not?"

"A dozen reasons if you like. First place, Lucille has no talent; she'd never do for any but the sort of thing that you saw her in last night. She's got into a bad style, and she would never get out of it. They would be down upon her, and crush her to pieces directly she appeared, and Conway James knows that, and is a d—d deal too good a judge to risk bringing her forward."

Lieut. Claude Ogilvie poured forth his reasons against such theatrical promotion with almost the volubility of a woman. He knew that the fair owner of the massive white arms and the voluptuously large eyes would not thank him for such a result of the introduction he had given Sir Victor Cleeve.

"I thought she was very good in light comedy, you said," Victor urged. He was very anxious to do some tangible service to the daughter of the deceased branch of some goodly stock who had been lost in the cause of his country.

"So she is; but there are a score better in town at this moment who can't work an engagement. No, no!—don't subject her to the humiliation of a public failure, Cleeve. I have much too high an opinion of her to let you do it."

But it seemed to Sir Victor Cleeve that there could be no inconsiderable dramatic power in a soul of which such eyes were the windows. He thought that Claude underrated her—or at any rate, that the Baby was no judge. "I'll speak to Conway James about it," he thought. And then he resolved, that if Conway would use his interest with some manager to get her brought forward, he would take care that her path was smoothed between that event and the winning of her earliest laurels, in such a way as would offend neither her pride nor her mother's prudence.

"What a boy he is!" had been Charlie's exclamation on that August evening, six months ago now, when he

had sprang from the lumbering old family coach—type of a bygone aristocracy—full into their sight. And what a boy he was still in many things—in his generous unsuspecting honour and faith. He had no thought that this girl, whom he admired and pitied because her fate seemed harder than was fitting, was other than she seemed—a pure, good, hard-toiling woman, fighting the battle of life for herself and mother bravely, and with but a meagre reward. He was a gentle-natured man, full of bravery and tenderness towards women. And when he thought of this beautiful girl—fatherless and fortuneless—treading her difficult path alone and unassisted, a great pity sprang up in his heart, and he resolved that, as far as was in his power, he would aid her.

He was a thorough boy still; he had a grand faith in the honour of men and the purity of women. The story of his mother's self-abnegation had been told to him, but he had never heard the tale of her ill-usage.

He had got rid of Claude Ogilvie shortly after he had come to this decision, by telling the Baby that Archimedes was at his service, and wanted a bucketing. And then, when the Baby had availed himself of this permission by strolling out to order the horse, Sir Victor Cleeve went to Conway James's hut, where he found that gentleman deep in the pages of a book that was absorbing us all in those days—"Lady Audley's Secret."

"I want you to do me a service, James," he began; "and to do it without letting my name appear at all."

"Got into a mess? I'll do any number of services, old fellow, if you only do me one now."

"What is it?—No, I'm all right."

"Then just leave me to the peaceful perusal of one of the neatest bits of feminine fiendishness I ever had the happiness of meeting in or out of a novel—and I've met some ugly customers, too, in the flesh," he continued meditatively.

"Your novel can wait, and I can't," Victor said, picking up the first volume. "This is a life romance, old fellow;" and then he told his story.

It must be confessed that Conway James did not listen very attentively. Who would have listened attentively under the circumstances of George Talboys being in the well, and Robert Audley harrying my lady out of that subtly-adjusted mind of hers, which o'er toppled when it could serve her no longer? He did not listen attentively—otherwise he would have said more than he did.

"I've no more stage interest than I'm bound to use for some one else, Cleeve; and you look here, don't let Claude Ogilvie make a tool of you—the Baby has managed his *amours* without help hitherto."

"You're wrong altogether. However, if you are pledged elsewhere, I will say no more," Victor said rather stiffly. He was annoyed at Captain Conway James deeming it possible that he, Sir Victor Cleeve, could be made a tool of for an unworthy end by any man. So, though he still determined to serve this young lady if he could, he made up his mind not to subject her name to the ribald jokes of the Captain again. Claude was far more sympathetic: in the Baby, and the Baby alone, would he place confidence in the conduct of this delicate case.

But, despite his righteous wrath against Conway James, he remained in that gallant officer's quarters all the morning; for he had taken up the first volume of a book that no one ever put down again unread. And though he was free to take it away with him, he preferred remaining, for he had views as to the immediate reversion of the second and third, and these views could not have been carried out, had he not let wrath go by to the extent of remaining with the offender.

And while he was reading "Lady Audley's Secret," the Baby was good enough to air, first his horse, Archimedes, and then his views respecting her to Miss Lucille Michel.

"That wont suit my book at all, Claude," the daughter whose filial feelings had devoted her to the drama said, with determination; "that wont suit my book at all now. Time was when it would; but I don't get younger, and

the thought of professional success 'delights me not' any more."

"I told him it was no use," the Baby said rather sulkily; "but, mind you, I can't make him do what you want. I can only lead him to the water; if he won't drink, it won't be my fault."

"It will be your misfortune, then," she said, with a loud, rather coarse laugh, such a one as she would not have laughed before Victor for the world.

"How so?" he said uneasily.

"Your letters were so pretty that I kept them, that's all," she said; "and the prettiest of them all, the last you ever wrote to me, contains what you wouldn't care to see brought into court."

"I was a minor, and not responsible," he said, languidly; "and that reminds me he's a minor too. You'll have to tie him with the 'doth any one know any just cause or impediment' ropes, for it to be any good, if it comes to that."

"Thanks for the hint, Baby," she replied coolly; "but as to yourself, you're labouring under a little mistake. Your last letter to me was dated on the 12th of February last, and you were of age on the 21st of the December previous. I went down to your parish church, and took a copy of the register of your baptism, in case I might ever want it!"

"Ah!" the Baby said, more languid than before, "that was clever of you. In another case of that kind I'll be more cautious; women are so mean."

"That's right," she said, mockingly; "it was a foolish boy in those days, but it's wiser now, and will help to make its friend happy for life."

"I only bargained to introduce him, mind you," he said, more animatedly; "I'm not going to do any more than I bargained for."

"You'll give me a helping hand whenever I want your help," Miss Lucille said, with a sneer; "you'll think of that letter, and you won't stand to the letter of your bargain."

He knew he was in her power, for an "action for breach of promise" would be ruin in his career, and

he would rather have put a pistol to his head and blown his brains out, than marry this woman whom he was about to aid in foisting on his friend. But he knew that he was in her power, and he hated her for her taunting words and her unconcealed intention to use him. He hated her, and longed to sting her! And he did it in his languid, graceful, half-unconscious way, most thoroughly.

"You're awfully old for him, Lucille, that's the worst of it."

"What!" she said, sharply.

"I was going to regret," he began, opening his insolent blue eyes a trifle wider, "that I couldn't find anything more advanced for you; you're awfully old for him: when he comes to think——"

The Baby was never nearer having his beard curled for him by a pair of writhing feminine hands than he was at this moment. But, happily, he was not aware of his danger, therefore he maintained his nonchalance unimpaired.

"You are too thoughtful and considerate, Baby; why should he 'come to think,' while 'thinking' is any use, more than you did? You didn't think about my age till after you said you'd marry me."

"You were a few months younger then," the amiable Baby rejoined, pleasantly; "and a few months, at your age, my dear Lucille, make the devil's own difference. You'll have to keep well in the shade always; by candle-light you might be only seven or eight and twenty still."

She did not "look" more than twenty in the shade, but the Baby could not be generous to a woman who might blight the only honourable thing about him, his professional career.

She turned her great angry dark eyes upon him, and there was that in their glances that made him relent from aggravating her further on the topic she loathed. He knew her despicable; he knew her an *intrigante* after no very exalted pattern; he knew her full of low trickery, and capable of any amount of deception that should further her own ends. He hated her occasionally for har-

rasing him and worrying him with the curb he had once been weak enough to suffer her to put into his mouth. And yet now, for all this knowledge and all this hatred, he held his scourging hand, for the love that he had kindled in her heart lived in her eyes now, and quenched their fierceness.

"What is the name of Sir Victor Cleeve's place?" she asked, presently.

"The Chase; it's in Devonshire. I think I told you last night. When you're married to him, will you ever ask me there?"

"Yes," she said, "if you would be capable of coming."

"I'm capable of anything, Lucille. Oh, by the way, I've a hint to give you. If you can't make your mother hold her tongue, you may as well give the game up at once. He nearly took fright last night, and asked if she wasn't rather queer to be your mother. I told him that your father was a great swell, who had made a *mésalliance*, but that she was the worthiest of her sex. He asked, too, if your father was alive when I knew you first, and I told him that you had had the misfortune to lose him before I had the happiness of knowing you. Stand to the same story, which is true enough, as far as it goes, and silence your mother, and you'll be all right."

"How am I to silence her, Baby?" she said, angrily. "She makes no account whatever of her h's now."

"Choke her!" the Baby humanely suggested; "or if you can't do that, give her bronchitis, and tie her head up in flannel. He won't think it odd that she never speaks, if you do that."

"Will you have him at the theatre to-night?" she said, reflectively.

"Yes; but you can't miss your ma' two succeeding nights. You had better give her the bronchitis before you go, and then if your uncle isn't there to take care of you, common civility will oblige him to see you safely through the camp. If you manage him properly to-night, you won't require extraneous assistance any more. If he comes to see you, the less you speak about me the better, I think."

"Don't be afraid, Baby," she said; and she threw her head up and looked down at the handsome young loungee with almost an air of dignity—this treacherous creature, who was cast for such an important part in the drama of Victor Cleeve's life! "Don't be afraid, Baby! If you can keep common faith with me, I'll not say anything to hurt you."

He was sitting on a little couch with a broken spring in it, that was planted on one side of the fire; and she was seated on a high chair—rigid and devoid of even the appearance of ease—in front. She threw the wide, loose, hanging sleeves of her jacket back, and laid her round, white arms on her lap, with her well formed, rather muscular hands closely clasping one another—the fingers interlaced.

He bent forward from the couch, and lightly pressed his lips on her fingers, "in token of friendship," he said in explanation; "now I want you to give me one in return."

The full dark eyes grew softer as Miss Lucille lowered her lids and turned her face slightly towards him.

"I didn't mean a kiss," he said, laughing lightly; "I meant a token of friendship. Give me back my letter."

She sprang to her feet, quivering with anger. This handsome boy—for he was but a boy to her—had touched her heart more nearly than anything else in the world, and he made a laugh of her passion, and scoffed at her exhibition of it.

"What do you want with your letter?" she asked. And he told her only to read it: he would give it to her again when together they had perused the lines that he had written when they cared for one another.

She took a letter from a little torn and tattered old writing-case, and handed it to him. And he, without a moment's delay, threw it into the flames.

He watched for an explosion of wrath, but none came. The handsome Miss Michel maintained a perfect quiet.

"Now I'll be d——d if I let Cleeve into such a cursed scrape as a marriage with you would be," he said, coolly. "Those other letters were written before I came of age."

"Oh, you Baby, did you think I'd give the one I wanted to keep into your honourable keeping for a minute?" she said, mockingly. "You're as crafty and cowardly as ever you were, Claude Ogilvie; but you won't shake me off any more, I can tell you."

These were the beings whom Victor Cleeve was vowing to befriend and trust at that very moment!—these were the teachers in that stern school to which Madge had succeeded in sending her cousin, in order that he might return after a taste of almost Spartan severity and simplicity to the alluring joys of a home fraught with the graceful presence of woman.

"Well, I give up," Claude said when he was about to leave her; "you're like fate, in that you're inexorable. All I ask is, don't betray that I've been your accomplice when you carry your point—and keep your mother quiet."

When Sir Victor, accompanied by his friend the Baby, went round to the green-room that night, they heard with much concern that Mrs. Mitchell was laid up with bronchitis, and that Mr. Blackman had, previous to this fact becoming known, accepted an invitation to supper from an aspiring young amateur dramatic ensign.

CHAPTER XXI.

MISS MICHEL AT HOME.

CLAUDE OGILVIE thought himself "regularly planted" a few days before the advent of the company of strolling players whose arrival had imparted a fresh vitality to the nearly extinct theatrical life of Aldershot. He received a letter from the Miss Michel, who had aided in lightening those weary hours at Woolwich when his prospects were unilluminated by either balls or billiards; and this latter contained a request and a threat. The request was that he should marry her as he had promised to do on more than one occasion; and at this he laughed lazily.

"Shouldn't have thought she was such an ass as to have believed it," he remarked, pausing to light a cigar before he went on with the perusal of the letter.

When he did go on he left off smoking, and thinking Lucille what he had just termed her.

The request was weak; the threat was quite the reverse! There was not the faintest shadow of a doubt on his mind as he read it that she thoroughly meant what she said. If he did not fulfil his promise to her she would bring an action against him for the breach of it. She put her intention broadly and plainly before him, and though, as has been said before, he would rather have put a pistol to his head and blown his brains out than marry this woman, he was willing to do aught else that could be devised to avert the disgrace with which she threatened him.

No very fine feelings could be unstrung by remorse for having jilted such a woman. She had not been a delicate, confiding young creature, whom to deceive would be dishonourable and diabolical. What he shrank from was the fact cropping out that he had been imbecile enough to have let such a mature trickster cajole him. He wanted to be deemed a lazy young Lothario—a Don Juan, who came and saw, and conquered when he listed with impunity to himself. And he knew that if this affair was made public he would be dubbed a raw sub, who had been made to pay pretty heavily for the temporary possession of the riddled, battered heart of a strolling-player, who had ranted tragedy in the lowest theatres of seaport towns to drunken sailors and their brutalized sweethearts and spouses.

He answered her letter at once, and gave no signs of the dismay he felt. There had been no unnecessary circumlocution in her letter; there was none in his answer to it.

"You can come if you like," he wrote, "and I shall be very glad to see you again. I'll introduce a friend of mine to you who's better worth winning than I am. As to marrying you myself, as you do me the honour to propose, that's out of the question."

He meant no greater baseness than this at first, to put Lucille off the track she seemed obstinately bent on pursuing towards himself by getting her to concentrate her whole powers on the subjugation of his friend. But after his first interview with her he went a step further, and tried to throw a halo of romance around her in order that she might the more effectually appeal to the chivalrous and romantic mind of the young baronet. In fact, he wanted to be quit of her now at any cost. Sir Victor Cleeve was less dear to him than he was to himself. Therefore, if one must be sacrificed, it should be Sir Victor Cleeve.

They did not run their pieces long at Aldershatt. They were far from rigorous, that amiable audience, as to scenery and properties; and as the amateur dramatists were intensely anxious to increase their *repertoire* of characters, those who were engaged had plenty to do in the way of rehearsal and studying their parts. Professionally, therefore, Miss Michel's time was very fully occupied; and whether it was owing to the hard work, or to her filial anxieties (Mrs. Mitchell was still suffering from bronchitis), or to some other cause or causes unknown, Victor could not tell, but he observed that her eyes grew bigger, and more melancholy daily, or rather nightly.

"Awful work for a girl, isn't it, trudging twice a day backwards and forwards through the snow and sleet from the town to the theatre?" Claude Ogilvie said to Sir Victor one morning as Lucille's tall figure came out from the door of the lodgings and turned in the direction of the camp.

"Awful!" Victor responded, with genuine feeling.

"I wish I had a trap, I'd tool her over at night," the Baby went on, looking after the decreasing figure of Miss Michel with an air of the gravest commiseration.

Sir Victor reflected for a minute, and for the sapiency of the result of his reflections he might just as well have spoken without thought.

"Unless some of this snow thaws off before night,"

he said, "a trap wouldn't be of much use. I wish I had a sledge; I'd put Tom Tit and the brown in tandem."

"You might telegraph to town for one," Claude Ogilvie suggested. And then, remembering that Sir Victor's desire to drive Miss Lucille in it might very possibly die away before the sledge could be forwarded, he added, "or you might borrow our colonel's—he's a good-natured fellow, and hates it himself. He would lend it to you in a minute."

They had walked by this time a little away from the town, into the open, flat, desolate country around. The snow was lying in an unbroken, undefiled glittering sheet about them in all directions, as far as they could see. Such snow was not to be despised and neglected. The temptation to turn it to account was strong—the temptation to put the brown and Tom Tit in together, tandem, was stronger; the temptation to do a slight service to Miss Lucille Michel was strongest of all.

The Colonel had a wife and daughters. Mrs. Terry had been a beauty, her friends said, and was still possessed of what they called "a very young back." Despite this drawback to domestic peace—for it is a drawback, where grown-up daughters are co-existent with it—she was good-naturedly desirous of seeing her girls well married. As soon, therefore, as she heard of Sir Victor's application for the sledge, she said, "Let him have it by all means—and ask him to dinner."

The sledge was sent to the hotel, and Sir Victor was as ecstatic as a schoolboy when his horses were put in—Tom Tit as wheeler, and the brown as leader. There was something exhilarating in the perverse disposition the brown displayed that added to the natural exhilaration consequent on a first attempt at tandem driving over the snow on a bright, keen day. But ecstatically exhilarated as he was, he could not be blind to the fact of there being something unpractical in the idea of conveying Miss Michel to her duties in a sledge-tandem.

He saw her that evening, and confided to her what

had been his intention, and the reason of his non-fulfilment of it.

"I am sorry for it," she said, in a low tone, casting, at the same time, what he thought was almost a terrified look at Mr. Blackman; "for I delight in tandems—or used at one time."

She heaved a stupendous sigh, and he thought that probably her respected father had driven tandem in days gone by, and that her memory had flown back to those days regretfully—no wonder!

She was soft and gentle behind the scenes to-night, and before them she had been specially so as loving, injured Desdemona. There was a good deal of cloudy muslin and melancholy about her, and Sir Victor's pity for her increased.

"Shall you drive out to-morrow?" she presently asked.

"Yes," he told her.

"Oh! do tell me the hour," she said, eagerly; "let me at least see—what I may never hope to enjoy again."

"Let me take you for a drive—do—Claude and I are going at twelve; but if you must attend rehearsal, we could wait till any hour that suited you better."

Miss Michel shook her head very sadly for a minute, and gave him the full benefit of her eyes. Then she did a bit of the "relenting and indecision business," as Claude would have termed it; and finally she agreed to go with him at twelve.

"Couldn't you take me up at the end of the street? The temptation is so strong, Sir Victor, but mamma will disapprove, I fear, and I cannot risk this pleasure now I have given way to the thoughts of enjoying it."

She had to go on to be smothered at this juncture, and Sir Victor had time to think about it.

He disliked doing anything underhand; the very idea of it was repellant to him. He meant no wrong, and if he took this young lady (whom he could not bear to disappoint) out without her mother's sanction, it would throw a colouring over the affair from which the unkind

would educe evil. He put this view of the case mildly but firmly before Miss Michel, and she assented to his proposition, and promised to consult her mamma.

That worthy lady was indulging in a slight refectation of fried haddock and sausages when her daughter returned home that night.

"We shall have something to work upon from to-morrow," Lucille said, taking her bonnet off, and burying her face in her hands to rest her weary head.

"So we ought, after shuttin' me up in this way," Mrs. Mitchell replied. "What has he done now?"

"Offered to take me in his sledge to-morrow—if you would consent to it." And at this the mother and daughter both laughed.

"He's coming to-morrow for your answer," Lucille went on; "I shall have to sit up half the night to make things ready to go in."

"I'll tell him to pave the way, you know, that I know that he'd never bring discredit on a 'arth that, though

"No, no; none of that," her daughter said, sternly; "say very little, but look! The impression to be given is, that I've borne down your motherly scruples by the sheer force of my desire to taste once more a pleasure of former days, of which, through the cruelty of fate, I've been deprived in the most melancholy manner. You see?"

"Yes," Mrs. Mitchell replied, nodding thoughtfully; "but let me 'av a few words."

"The fewer you have the better; you always make a mess of them," her daughter said, shortly. Miss Michel was a bad actress, but a sharp dramatic critic.

"I will 'av a few words, Lucy—it's no use if they're only to take me off—such as, 'Oh! sir, you have conquered.'" Mrs. Mitchell treated the scene that was to ensue in a thoroughly professional spirit.

"'Sir Victor, you have conquered,' will be better, if he presses very much. Or, better still, when he has asked, and I've said a few words, say (let's see, I wout give you any h's or g's if I can help it), 'I am unwise; I

know it; but I cannot withstand that look;” and then point at me; I’ll have a look ready.”

Mrs. Mitchell nodded, with a smart, intelligent “That’s better, Lucy—much better. Give me the cue.”

“‘To give up;’ and don’t mug, mother. Now hadn’t you better go to bed, for I have a good deal to do to night?”

She was very much fatigued. She had led her plodding, wearisome life for many years now. But plodding and weariness are not things to which one gets more accustomed or more attached the longer they are known. A young lady in society coming home tired in this way, would have required the attention of at least a pair of prompt and tender hands in addition to her own, to aid her in the hasty search of rest. She would have expected her coffee to be served with speed, and her hair to be brushed with care, and her white boots to be gently removed, and an attentive ear to be bent to whatever she pleased to utter, and to be bored with no questions or remarks. But this soothing treatment of the case was not, as Mrs. Mitchell would have said, “for the likes of her.”

She wasted no time in useless repining and lamentations over the hardness of the fate which compelled her to steal from the night, in order that she might fairly meet the demands of the day. She first mastered the words of her part in the new piece they were going to run, and then she opened a trunk that was in the room, and took therefrom a dress, and a clear black bonnet-shape, and some lace and black ribbon velvet.

She spread these things out upon the table, and then sat down and looked at them. Looked at them, not in idle irresolution (for she was essentially a woman of action), but with a keen analytical glance. She was deciding how they could be most rapidly dissected, and most effectively put together again.

Miss Michel, despite the soft voluptuous splendour of her dark eyes, looked as she sat there merely a handsome, hard-featured woman of thirty; and she often looked so when none were by to see. But she knew that by dint

of a considerable expenditure of time, trouble, and artistic skill, she would look a very different being when she seated herself in the sledge beside Sir Victor Cleeve.

She was resolved to spare no pains in securing an appearance for herself on the morrow that should live in his remembrance as an admirable thing. "He must see that I have 'personal claims' that must not be lightly wrecked," she thought; "it's wise to destroy an ugly weed, but wanton to ruin a rose."

She was resolved to spare no pains in the arrangement of the sole materials she had; but the task was a weary and a long one, even to the nimble-fingered woman whose soul was in her work. She covered the bonnet-shape with the black lace in a slap-dash way that would have wrung the heart of a milliner, but the effect was good when she finished it by planting one pink rose on its brim and a second in front of the cap, in such a way as would enable her to pull it down and poise on the top of her nose.

Then she turned to the dress, which she first took in at every seam; for she was resolved to lace herself up and impress him with the slenderness of her figure. It has been said that she was slight and well formed: she had the long, clean sweeping throat and neck, and round small bust of a nymph, when she was arrayed for conquest in a deftly-made corset and tight dress.

It was a long, tedious task, but she never once relaxed over it, and when it was completed the morning light came straggling through the ill-fitting shutters into the room. But any one who had seen the dress that she took out of the trunk would, on looking at the metamorphosed one she folded away in it again, have confessed that the time had been well spent.

Then the poor, false-hearted, erring, unfortunate woman went to bed and slept the sleep of the just for an hour or two; and if any one had been there to look for them, many threads of silver might have been found amongst those raven locks which streamed over the pillow. The Baby was right! she was "awfully old" to be the wife of Sir Victor Cleeve.

She was up and at her work again betimes in the morning. First she studied her part, next she painted her face, and then she rehearsed the scene that was to be enacted before Sir Victor Cleeve with her mother.

After an hour's hard work, she came out from under her own artistic hands a tinted Venus not one whit inferior to Gibson's. Her performance was meritorious in the highest degree, inasmuch as it would bear almost microscopic observation even in the garish light of day. She was no tyro, no blunderer, in this art of making up the face. She did it in a way that defied detection, that commanded admiration and provoked envy. The yellowish powder dear to the brunette cheek was put on with a cunning hand; it looked like the natural efflorescence of her clear, dark skin. She eschewed much of the rouge on this cold January day. Nature would give her colour enough in the air. But the rosiness of her pouting mouth, and the dazzling whiteness of her brow, were due and must be credited solely to herself.

Then she put some innocent-looking pomade on her hair, and dashed some gold-dust over it; and these obliterated all traces of the silver threads, and gave a ruddy glory to so much of her dark hair as could be seen. And then, goodness knows what she did to her eyes, but they came out larger and darker, and more voluptuously tender and limpid than they had ever looked before. Whether she turned the lids inside out and blackened them, and then dropped belladonna into the orbs themselves, this deponent sayeth not; but such things are!

There is only one expression for it—she looked magnificently handsome when Sir Victor Cleeve came to prefer his request that he might give her daughter this treat to Mrs. Mitchell, and magnificently handsome he thought her, and most touchingly devoted to the rather unpleasant mother who was still suffering from bronchitis.

The falsehood was acted very neatly, on the whole. An older man might have found it out, but Victor had great faith in human kind still. Miss Michel was prettily disappointed and sweetly resigned; her mamma was unwilling to deprive her of the pleasure—afraid of doing

ought that might prejudice her darling—utterly unable to bear to deprive of a single pleasure one whom fate had deprived of so much. In the end, as had been arranged, Mrs. Mitchell succumbed, and Miss Michel put on her bonnet.

Sir Victor went back to his hotel for the sledge in a glow of amiable triumph. "Poor girl! it will do her good," he thought. "Oh, something better must be found for her!—it's cruel not to encourage such talent as hers!" And then he resolved to get his winsome cousin Madge, whose persuasion surely no man could resist, to plead the cause of this blighted histrionic with Captain Conway James.

"Has Mr. Ogilvie come up?" he asked of his groom, who was standing at Archimedes' head, endeavouring to restrain the desire that quadruped manifested to hurl himself free of the restraining leather which bound him in such an unpleasant position as regarded his friend Tom Tit.

"No, sir. Note, sir." And a wary hand was withdrawn from Archimedes' curb rein, and made the means of conveying five lines of "regret that he couldn't come," from Mr. Ogilvie to Sir Victor.

The Baby was a perfidious young officer and gentleman! It must be allowed that he was such, and utterly unworthy of the genuine regard Victor had for him, and regret Victor felt at his unavoidable absence now. Probably his regard was built on no better foundation than that a light, cheery laugh, and a fair, handsome face, and a pair of idly floating blue eyes offered. The Baby was essentially a pleasant fellow, with his good looks and graceful bearing and outward refinement. It is utterly impossible that the hearts of casual acquaintances can be sounded by casual acquaintances. Victor was no wiser than his generation, and took the Baby for what he seemed—an amiable Adonis "who'd do any fellow a good turn that he hadn't to open his eyes wide to effect." In fact, Claude was looked upon as void of guile, but not too clever, and Sir Victor Cleeve fell into the common error of sharing the general belief. He had to cease

from discomfiture at his friend's failing him, and give his whole attention and mind to the conduct of his horses now. It is a thankless task driving a couple of untutored horses tandem. Your hand may be most sympathetic to their mouths on ordinary occasions, and your eye infallible as to safe distances; but you will surely fret them and your eye fail you the first time you try them in a tandem. The brown diverged wildly to the left, and performed a *pas* on the door-step, and Tom Tit objected to his comrade's tail, and arranged his person in the same rigid and arch-backed fashion he was wont to exhibit when he was going to give a series of buck-jumps. The groom from the solid ground enjoyed the sight. With a jerk of his thumb he directed the attention of the hostlers and helpers to it.

"Ain't that a spectacle?" he asked. "Tom Tit's ready to jump out of his skin, and the little brown, he ain't a horse to spoil hisself in harness. They'll spill 'un as sure as 'un sits there."

But despite this prognostication, Sir Victor Cleeve contrived to land himself safely at Mrs. Mitchell's door, and to start from thence smoothly, with the beauty with the haunting eyes by his side.



CHAPTER XXII.

THE DRIVE THROUGH THE SNOW—AND ITS RESULTS.

SHE was quite enough of an actress for that, to take her place in the sledge beside Sir Victor Cleeve as if she had been accustomed to rolling and smoothing over the snow and stones all her life. "'Gad! showy-looking woman that!" one of a group of two or three men who were sauntering through the street said, as the tandem went along it in a loose but dashing fashion. Archimedes and Tom Tit went very badly, and were far from well driven; but they were unmistakably well bred

horses, and commanded, through that fact being very apparent, a certain respect.

"That young fellow's going the pace, isn't he?" Lieutenant Ogilvie said to Captain Conway James, when one of the aforesaid group mentioned to them the sight that had been witnessed. And Conway James regarded the Baby more morosely than he had ever done before, and said—

"I asked you to keep him clear of any scrape, Claude, and I believe you've let him into this. Who is this girl?"

"You know as much about her as I do," the Baby rejoined, carelessly, "or you might do so, for all I know to the contrary. She's an actress; I saw her at Woolwich some time ago, and I've seen her again here. If you see grounds for an accusation of collusion in that, well, I'm sorry for the experience you must have had, that's all."

The Baby looked most savagely insulted by the bare supposition of such an accusation being levelled against him. Conway James felt that he had better temporise if he desired to get aught like reliable information relative to the "showy-looking woman," from Lieutenant Claude Ogilvie.

"An actress!" he said, deprecatingly; "come, Claude, that's too good—you're not so deficient in discernment as not to distinguish between an actress and a strolling player. You're far too wide-awake to be humbugged. Who is this woman?—is she dangerous?"

The Baby laughed. His vanity came to his opponent's aid now, and threatened to betray him.

"Dangerous!" he repeated, derisively; "don't understand the term in connexion with a woman. She'd never be dangerous to me, I know—haven't met with the one yet who would be so."

"But is she likely to be dangerous to Cleeve?"

"No," the Baby replied stoutly, lifting his long blue eyes (and they looked very frank) up to Captain James's for perusal; "he's a devilish deal more likely to be dangerous to her. But I don't mean to be made the judge

between them—he didn't come up from West Barbary in my leading strings."

In the mean time, the pair under discussion were spinning along merrily over the snow. When they had gone four or five miles, and the groom had descended at least a dozen times to put the leader straight on end, the latter resigned himself to his fate, and submitted to the novelty of the situation. The lady leant back, covered up with a warm railway wrapper, and chirruped forth sentences and soundsexpressive of unmitigated pleasure. The air was bright, bracing, keen. The pace was great, and therefore pleausrably exciting. The companionship of this woman, who refrained from talking incessantly, and contented herself with uttering occasional clear ejaculations of joy, was delightful. It relieved him from the sense of solitude, and still did not interfere with his Jehuship. They had no bells—neither Tom Tit nor the brown would have consented to such an aggravation of the situation on any account—but despite the lack of what Poe calls the "tintinnabulation," they enjoyed all the exhilarating influences attendant on the progress of the nobles of the land "due north." The crystalized snow hung in weird fantastic shapes of beauty from the summits of the tall fir trees as they dashed along on the outskirts of the dark sombre woods. The smoke from far distant hamlets rose up to the heavens, clearly and distinctly traced against the bright cold-looking sky. All nature looked bright and rarified, and they waived the fact of the cold having pinched their noses with a rosy hand, and thought her transcendently beautiful.

They had started for their drive void of plans as to their destination. But when they found themselves on the high road to Reading, Sir Victor suggested that they should go on, and visit the handsome old ruddy town, and see the beauty and the wonders of it. And she, the acquiescent young lady in the black bonnet and pink roses, agreed to his suggestion with enthusiasm.

She abstained from telling him how and where they had been passed, but she impressed upon him frequently during this drive, that it brought back the memory of

happier days. And he was too courteous, too chivalrous, too manfully generous, and noble, and true himself, to test the lie by questioning.

The tandem spun along through the broad, bright, cheerful, handsome street, and into the yard of the quaint old inn, to enter which you have to dare the perils of a little tunnel. Who that has ever visited Reading does not know this inn, every brick of which seems fraught with that most seductive of all history, "local," and romance? It is the inn of other days—the inn of the dear old novels, where cavaliers came and slept, and murdered one another, and rode away on Flemish chargers the following morning. It is the inn of song and story, of which the host should be stalwart, stentorian voiced, encircled with keys, and always ready with a vaunt as to the superiority of his red Burgundy and Malvoisie. It is the inn of the old coaching days—of smoking steeds and clanging horn—and loving cup and "old English hospitality," that, however well paid for, was never dear at the price. It is the inn to make us loathe the new-fangled refreshment room of the railway station, with its wealth of bright paint and gilding, and poverty of comestibles. It is the inn of all others in England, in short, to appeal, with its broad ruddy ivy-templed smile, to our blithest memories of the past.

And in this inn, they partook of a large mid-day repast. The fair Lucille did not affect to be ethereal at all in her tastes. "Bread and cheese was very well," she said, when the landlord made the offer of it, "but beefsteak would be better—broiled, not fried." And the landlord smiled in serene pity and contempt for this stranger, who could suppose that the feebleness of frying beef was perpetrated on his premises.

There was one thing genuine about her; as regarded her appetite there could be no mistake. And she washed the beefsteaks down with such copious libations of port wine negus that the glory of the day was on its wane before they were ready to go and look at the town.

There is much that is interesting in Reading the inhabitants tell you if you listen to them. There are the

three and a half flints, and the conglomeration of clay and gravel which represent what was a celebrated abbey once. And there is the picturesque old church with its tessellated tower. And the other more modern one, which is still ancient enough to have had its bells tolled for King Charles, and to have been tortured in its masonry by Roundhead shot. There is a combination of venerable age and vigorous youth in the whole appearance of the town, which is rarely prepossessing. But perhaps to the practical mind the object of most interest in the place is Messrs. Peek and Frean's manufactory for biscuits.

We know how easily an hour or two is got rid of in a place of this sort—an old town I mean, not a manufactory for biscuits. They walked about it with an appearance of engrossed interest for a while—that young descendant of a noble line and the woman who had plodded through nearly every town in England, and felt no interest in any. And then she came out of the rich enjoyment of the present with an adroitly expressed qualm of dread and dismay at the discovery she affected but to have that moment made.

"It is past four," she said. "What shall I do if I'm late at the theatre?"

"It's only half-past four," he said; "you will be home in capital time—it doesn't open till seven, you know. I'll ask at the inn if there isn't a nearer way than the road we came—it seemed to me that we took a circular turn—and I'll drive fast, I promise you."

They went back quickly to the old inn about which the memories of the past clung, and where the beefsteaks had been consumed, and as they crossed the yard Sir Victor's groom ran over from the stable door to meet them.

"Thaw's begun, and it looks like rain sir," he said, anxiously. "I see fear of our getting home in the sledge."

"Oh, nonsense!" Sir Victor replied. The snow had seemed to lie very deeply all along the road as he had come, and he "saw no fear." "Put them in at once."

So they were put in, but it was nearly five o'clock before they were clear out of the old Reading inn, and fairly on the road homeward.

The day was dying rapidly, but the horses were fresh now, and Sir Victor gave them their heads. They almost flew along the road to meet the coming darkness which was looming up from the dark pine-tree woods that intervened between themselves and their distant goal. The day was dying, but the horses were fresh, and "we shall be there in good time after all," he said, with the view of reassuring his apparently timid companion. She said nothing, but sighed ever so gently, and that sigh made him let the lash fall on Tom Tit's shoulder and Archimedes' flank, and sent them along at an increased speed that made her 'ware of sighing again.

Presently the last bit of daylight faded out completely, and soon there was "no light in heaven or earth save the cold light of stars." They were dashing along at a reckless rate now, and a cruel grating sound told them at no infrequent intervals that there had been grounds for that assertion of the groom as to the thaw. "How the snow seems to have melted since the morning," Miss Michel said, when they had left Reading five miles behind them, and were plunging through the rucks and drifts that bordered a wood. "Hadn't we better get out and walk? I'm afraid the sledge will never get on."

The offer of getting out and walking was unpractical, considering Aldershott was at least eighteen miles distant. But it looked unselfish and considerate for the horses. The sledge was a heavy one, and it no longer glided over the ground—both horses were palpably pulling.

"No, no," Victor rejoined, "its horrid bad travelling for you, I'm aware, but if you won't be frightened, and wont mind a jolt now and then, they'll pull us through well enough. It wont hurt them; they're in first-rate condition.

She was playing for a heavy stake—too heavy a one for her to be frightened at aught short of failure. Each jolt, each obstruction to their being home in time was a

chance in her favour, that she would not have missed for the world.

A heavy, driving drizzle set steadily in their faces, and the night wind got up and howled at them. And presently the darkness, and the jerking strain that was every now and then administered to him through a want of decision in Tom Tit, became too much for the naturally irritable mind of the brown. He slipped on a half-frozen puddle, and recovered himself only to bound and plunge, and finally cast himself on his side.

The spirited young horse was nearly wild when they got him up again—a proceeding that involved great loss of time and outlay of trouble. And when he was got up he was obviously unsafe, and the now agitated histrionic declared she would rather walk than see Archimedes replaced as leader.

The only thing he could do under the circumstances he did do. The brown was cast loose, and consigned to the care of the groom, and the onus of conducting them in safety home was thrown entirely upon Tom Tit.

It is a horrible unpleasant situation to be in a sledge in the midst of darkness and a rapid thaw; and, to all one knows to the contrary, many miles from the possibility of assistance. One hates and detests the cumbrous thing that was such a thing of grace and beauty when the frost was on. Pity for the noble animal that was to drag, under such adverse circumstances, the mass of unrevolving wood, is merged in pity for one's own bones, every one of which appears to be cruelly ground against its neighbour as the sledge throbs, and jerks, and plunges over the road.

The idea of the return to Aldershott was unpleasant to Sir Victor in every way. It was humiliating for a man who had gone forth bravely with a pair of horses tandem, to return at night minus his leader because he had failed in managing him. It was annoying to feel that he was knocking a borrowed sledge to pieces, and above all it was humiliating and annoying that his thoughtlessness and disregard of the fleeting nature of time should be detrimental to Miss Michel's already far

from brilliant professional career. This last consideration made him lash Tom Tit into a galop, and make all sorts of resolutions about working an engagement for her on the London boards.

He did not begin to think of any possibly unpleasant consequences to himself yet. This girl, whom he liked he knew not why, and pitied for he hardly knew what, had never touched him to tenderness like gentle Alice Lisle, or thrilled him with emotion, as had his beautiful cousin Madge. He had liked her, and desired to do her a service, and, failing that, a passing kindness—nothing more. He was sorry that it should have ended in such discomfort for her, that was all. He had no thought about himself.

So on and on they went for what seemed a weary time to the man who was anxious to deposit her at home in time for her to fulfil her engagement. Sometimes with a delusive prospect of success when the snow still remained as it did in well-shaded spots, and sometimes with a dragging heaviness that was hard to endure in the darkness.

It seemed to grow lighter as they at last approached the neighbourhood of Aldershatt, for the country is more open there, and the cold light of stars came down unimpeded by fir-trees. And when they were within a mile or so of their goal, Miss Michel asked him, in her most dulcet accents, to look at his watch.

"It's no use—I can't see it," he said; "but there's a house of some kind or other on a little distance—don't you see the light? I'll pull up there and ask."

It was a little roadside inn at which they gained the information that sent the first pang of dread through Victor's mind. "Eight o'clock," the man told them, was the hour. And as they drove on, Miss Michel bent her head down upon her hands and sobbed, "Oh, my God! what will become of me!"

"They *can't* blame you for such a confounded accident, Miss Michel," he said, anxiously; "if there's anyone to blame, it's I, not you."

"Be assured that I shall never blame you," she re-

plied; "but oh! Sir Victor, forgive me for saying I am most miserable."

Her sobs fell upon his ear above the howling wind. Her large eyes darted deprecating glances at him through the darkness. He began to feel that it was on his honour that this gently-born lady should not suffer through him, and yet, what on earth could he do for her?

His heart was beating quickly when at last he pulled up at the door of Miss Michel's temporary home. "For mercy's sake come in and explain," she whispered, and he found himself compelled to do so, for she called a little street boy up, and commanded him to stand by Tom Tit's head.

Mrs. Mitchell was enacting the part of bereaved and broken-hearted mother by the light of one fourpenny dip when they entered. But she speedily came out of passive woe, and hurled a cascade of questions at the pair.

She asked herself many times why she had not obeyed the promptings of prudence rather than of her heart, which latter had induced her to let her daughter go forth to ruin and disgrace. And when Sir Victor rather hotly arrested her eloquence by indignantly denying that her daughter had gone forth to anything of the kind, she relapsed into dismal tenderness, and prayed him "to forgive a broken-hearted woman whose only child was ruined."

"But how?" Victor urged. "My dear madam, listen to reason! I know the gentlemen who have availed themselves of Miss Michel's dramatic services too well to doubt for an instant that they will excuse her non-fulfilment of her engagement, when they hear the circumstances."

"It isn't the engagement, but her professional career is blighted, for her uncle casts her off for ever."

"Then," said Miss Michel, subsiding, with a saintly expression of resignation on her face, on to her knees—"Then, mother, we must starve!"

Tableau!—Mother and daughter embrace.

Sir Victor Cleeve looks upon them with contrition.

CHAPTER XXIII.

MR. BLACKMAN CANNOT CONSENT TO GOLD HEALING
THE HURT THAT HONOUR FEELS.

HUMAN nature revolts at a lecture! No amount of propitiatory jam makes the obnoxious pill one bit the less obnoxious to the mental palate of the unfortunate who has been made to swallow it. When our faults are flogging us, we may howl "*Mea culpa*, I've done very wrong;" regardless of who may hear. But until that is the state of the case, we writhe under the verbal infliction of the superior knowledge, and goodness, and virtue of our lecturing friends.

"High minds of native fire and force
Most keenly feel thy pangs, remorse!"

Walter Scott tells us in one of those poems, which, though they be lacking in much, are almost unequalled in "go."

All through the night succeeding that luckless drive over the snow that melted too fast, Sir Victor was a prey to those pangs. He was miserable at the idea of being the instrument fate had used to wreak additional injustice on this unhappy girl, who had now, according to her own statement, nothing to do in life save to starve with her mother. He felt himself to be a miscreant for not having devised on the spot some brilliant plan by which peace, happiness, wealth, and respectability could be assured to her. He wished that Madge had not laid that embargo upon their correspondence. Had she not done so, he would now have consulted that clear-headed young lady as to what it behoved him to do for this sport of fortune with the haunting eyes. As it was, he would consult Claude Ogilvie and his own heart alone.

But in the morning, when Conway James came down to his hotel, he felt more rage than remorse; for Conway was in earnest in his denunciations, and he very unscrup-

pulously declared Miss Michel to be a designing woman, and Victor himself to be a deluded boy.

"For God's sake, don't outrage respectability for a woman of that kind," he wound up his exhortation with. And Victor savagely asked him "What he meant?" and felt hotly conscious of his meaning all the time. Every one seemed bent upon misjudging this girl—her uncle and his (Sir Victor's) friends alike. Since at his request and through his imprudence she was placed in this false light, it behoved him beyond all doubt to do something for her. But what could that something be, in the case of such a combination of pride, proper prudence, and poverty? There was the rub.

"Well, I don't want to play the Mentor," Conway James said after a time; nor in truth, to do him justice, had he any such desire—"but for Heaven's sake don't outrage respectability for the sake of such a woman as that!" And Victor chafed at the caution and the aspersion, and could hardly answer his friend for rage at that false estimate of woman's worth, which caused him to condemn without knowledge.

Captain Conway James returned to the camp, and sought out some of the men who had most to do with the management of the theatre. "Can't you drop the drama for awhile?" he said. And then he told some of his anxieties about the young man who had been in a measure placed under his care.

"You want to starve out the 'leading lady,' in fact," one of them said laughing. And then they made many jokes about the beauty with the haunting eyes, whom Sir Victor Cleeve was treating with such chivalrous respect.

Claude Ogilvie was Sir Victor's next visitor.

"There's the deuce to pay at the Mitchell's!" he said. "I called there just now, to hear whether Miss Lucille caught cold after her midnight—oh wasn't it midnight? beg pardon for the mistake—well, twilight exploits in the snow with you, and old Blackman bounced by and wouldn't speak to me—resents my having introduced you, I suppose—and the ladies couldn't see me. It's awkward, isn't it?"

The Baby omitted to state that his call and non-admission and Blackman's cut were prearranged things.

"Very awkward," poor Victor said, rather mournfully.

"The girl 'll get such slurs cast on her through it, you see," the Baby went on quietly; "own uncle turns against her, you see. Can't make her any compensation for that, can you?"

The Baby would have revelled in the idea of a woman getting slurs cast upon her through his own agency; but he was disposed to take a higher, more moral tone in the sacred cause of friendship.

"Archimedes cut his knees when he went down—the beast!" Victor replied. "But I wouldn't have cared for that, if I could only have got home in time to save this poor girl all the pain this affair will cause her—confound it!"

"Yes, it will be a precious scandal!" the Baby rejoined, mercilessly. "The women will go off quietly enough—they'll be broken-hearted, poor things, and give you no trouble; but Blackman's the devil when he's up."

Sir Victor turned a deaf ear to the Baby's definition of Blackman. He was thinking how little he could value immunity from trouble at the cost of Lucille's broken heart.

"Well, whatever comes, I'm your friend, Cleeve!—remember that. I know, however unfortunate appearances may be, that you meant to act a fair part enough. Therefore I'm your friend."

"You don't mean—" Victor began.

And then the Baby interrupted him by saying—

"I mean that Blackman may want satisfaction—by Jove!"

The boy was young and hot-blooded enough to fight any man, and ready—aye, ready—to do so should the occasion offer. But there was something too hideously repugnant to the mind of the nobly-born gentleman in the notion of "giving satisfaction" to the brother of Mrs. Mitchell.

Lieutenant Claude Ogilvie went away to the reading-

room about twelve, leaving Victor to the peaceful enjoyment of his own thoughts. They were not too pleasant, and they revolved round two points in a way that made his head ache. One was a wish that he had never come to Aldershott. And the other, that he was back in Devonshire, reading "Locksley Hall" to his cousins.

He began to feel that he was in danger—in danger of a something greater than a pistol-shot from Mr. Blackman.

His thoughts travelled back to the days when his dawning affection for Alice had been checked. She—the fair-faced Devonshire girl, with the soft blue eyes and soft white hands, that were more fitted for the caressing of infants than for the pressure of unauthorized lips—had buried her dead and married somebody else! But a sore feeling had remained in his mind ever since that he had been made to act a part that was not his idea of manly straightforwardness! "By Heaven! I'll do what I'm bound in honour to do by another woman!" he thought. And then a hope, wildly fervent and not to be checked, arose that his "honour" might not be deemed compromised in this affair with Miss Michel.

He was tossed about on the sea of remorse and passion, when Mr. Blackman was announced.

And the name of the visitor did not tend to calm the perturbation of the young host's spirits.

But the pride, and grace, and pluck of his race came to his aid, and caused him to meet Mr. Blackman like a prince—considerably to that gentleman's discomfiture.

To women—no matter how vulgar, coarse, common, or (to sum up all possible feminine shortcomings in two words) ill bred—Sir Victor Cleeve was gentle, tender, chivalrous, and deferential. He knew of no other manner than this to adopt towards them. When intimate he infused a deeper tone of familiarity, and to his inferiors a tone of cordiality. But the principal ingredients that made the composition such a success in all cases were the same—gentleness, tenderness, chivalry, and deference.

But to men he could be very different!

And he marked that difference now !

Mr. Blackman's legs had settled his career in life. In his earliest youth they had been deemed by his parents and loudly pronounced by friends of the family to be worthy of the sock and buskin. He had gone on the stage on the strength of them. And they having got into his head, as it were, filled it to the exclusion of all else save the fumes of beer, and caused him to neglect the labour and study which may alone command success. Consequently, he had remained a ranting stroller all his days. But the symmetry of his legs was unimpaired.

It was the first time Sir Victor had been favoured with a daylight view of Miss Michel's sole male relative and protector. And the daylight view of Mr. Blackman was not a pleasant one.

He was a large, coarse-looking man, with a round, red, fair face, like the face of a monstrous baby. The female portion of his audiences usually accredited him with the possession of "a merry eye;" a truth-loving physiognomist would more probably have described it as a villanously-humorous one. His huge, hairless face was surmounted by a large, long-locked brown wig, of that hue never seen in nature, which proclaims itself a luxuriant lie at the first glance. His long black coat was void of the relief a collar and shirt-cuffs would have given it; and the legs on which sanguine friends had prognosticated he would take a brilliant stand in life, were encased in trousers so tightly strapped down over his boots, that an old leak in the knee was started afresh, and defied all efforts at concealment.

He had calculated on Sir Victor betraying confusion or agitation. Sir Victor betrayed neither, though he felt no small amount of both. Therefore Mr. Blackman was thrown off the track he had thought to follow. Under the existent aspect of affairs he deemed it wise to adhere to his niece's plan of saying little and looking much.

Crossing the room with a step that was a compromise between the strut of the tragedy he knew and the hop of comedy, he laid an open note, with the crest of the most theatrically-disposed regiment in camp on the top of it before Sir Victor Cleeve. "Read that," he said.

And Sir Victor read that—

"The Officers of the —— begged to inform Mr. Blackman that the services of his dramatic company will not be required by them after the expiration of the present week. They decline, therefore, to enter, as he proposes, into a fresh engagement."

Victor felt a flame of rage shoot up and flush his brow as he read these words. "The fellows might have spared me this complication of the case—confound them," he thought. And his prayer to be delivered from this "ill-judged," as he deemed it, interference of his friend Conway James, was not more fervent than the anathema he bestowed upon the whole corps.

"I am sorry your relations with the camp should have terminated sooner than you desired," he said, coldly. "I didn't know that you had grounds for imagining that your original engagement would have been extended. And you can hardly hold me accountable for its not being so."

"My unhappy, infatuated niece has held the same language to me, Sir Victor Cleeve, and I turned a deaf ear to them, and declined to hear her words. 'Spare him,' she said, 'I will bear all the obloquy, as I shall have to bear all the evil.'" There seemed even to Mr. Blackman a lack of all reason in this, so he paused with the intention of turning the sentence afresh. The pause enabled him to perceive that Victor was touched already, and that the sentence might stand with safety.

"Miss Michel is very generous," he said; "but really, when you talk about obloquy and evil and that sort of thing, you exaggerate my carelessness as to time. However, I shall be happy to make you compensation, Mr. Blackman, for what you may think you may have lost through me. Whatever sum the officers would have paid you for your services for the next month I will pay you down at once. You can't pretend to think that your possible engagement here could have lasted more than a month longer."

"Not for thrice the sum," Mr. Blackman responded solemnly. And Sir Victor Cleeve threw himself back in

the chair from which he had risen to reach his cheque-book as he made the offer, and replied—

“Don’t be too exorbitant, or you won’t get anything. Just name your terms, and—get out of the room.”

“The wound that honour feels cannot be healed by gold,” Mr. Blackman said, with an emotion that did him credit, it was so well assumed. And then, after no trifling circumlocution, Sir Victor was given to understand that Mr. Blackman had not come to him to extort dross, but to relieve his o’er-charged heart by denouncing Sir Victor as the “destroyer, socially, of his niece.”

“She charged me not to seek you; her sole desire is to spare your fine feelings; but I am not a weak woman, and I determined to tell you what you had done. I have done with *her*. The woman who defends and refuses to see cause for censure in such conduct as yours, is no fit companion for my innocent daughters—fair, lovely girls, who know little save how ‘to spin and be virtuous,’ and whose minds shall never be sullied while I, their sole surviving parent, can prevent it.”

With this brief tribute to the virtues and acknowledgment of the claims of beings who did not exist, Mr. Blackman hastily withdrew—he began to distrust his own strength in the matter of continuing steadfast in the declination of the dross. And he knew that if in one jot or tittle he fell away from the formula his niece had commanded him to observe, that that rather arbitrary young lady would make him repent of the weakness. Therefore he fled the temptation the sight of the still open cheque-book offered, and left the harassed young baronet once more alone.

Alone! free to think of Lucille and of her true womanly generosity, and desire to bear the brunt of all this, and save him from the shadow of annoyance. Alone with thoughts of the native nobility of that mind which could remain pure, unselfish, and undefiled amongst such a sordid band. Alone with a horrible distrust of his own heart, which seemed inclined to falter on the obvious path of honour. Alone with a bitter sense of self-reproach for having “compromised” any woman—least

of all one who was poor and nearly unprotected. They were right to leave him "alone"—those who were seeking to compass his destruction.

"If she can love me I'll ask her to be my wife," he said to himself. And then his brow flushed and his heart beat quicker as the conviction forced itself upon him that there was little doubt as to her capability of loving, who had shown herself so capable of uncomplainingly bearing sorrow and scorn for him.

He shrank from disporting himself in the camp or the street where he might meet with men whom he knew this day. The idea of either censure or chaff on the subject of the beauty with the haunting eyes was particularly repulsive to him. He had decided on going to the Mitchells and making them all the amends for what Miss Lucille was enduring through him that was in his power. But he had also decided that he would not do this till the daylight died out of the sky—and the hours that intervened between Mr. Blackman's departure and the death of the daylight were long and wearisome. No one came near him! Captain Conway James had gone up to town, and everybody else was too much engaged in the discussion of the affair according to Claude Ogilvie's version of it. Two or three small betting men were making a book on the event—the offers of five to one on Miss Lucille's marrying the baronet were made freely. Mrs. Terry heard a rumour of the unlucky Reading business in the course of a morning call she was making, and forthwith she caused the sledge to be sent for with severity, and countermanded the invitation to dinner which she had counselled should be given to Sir Victor Cleeve. "Young men who drive public characters about are not marrying men," she said; "they don't propose, that is, to girls in whose neighbourhood they've been setting order and decency at defiance." So she stiffened her young back at the idea of his delinquencies, and discussed his supposed depravity at full length with another of the queens of the camp before their unsophisticated daughters, until the indignation of these young ladies rose mountains high against the man who was a good *parti* and vicious enough to sin in the light of day.

The day was a long and depressing one to the man who passed it in the making of good resolutions in that dull little Aldershatt hotel. Virtue was its own reward! He would not have done a mean, wrong, or vicious thing for the world, and here the women of his acquaintance were reviling him with fervour for being guilty of that from which his pride and taste revolted, and the men were reviling him for a lack of vice, and a superfluity of folly. "I believe, if she holds out, he'll marry her," said one, and the one to whom he said it was Lieutenant Claude Ogilvie.

"I ain't his keeper," the Baby returned, shrugging his shoulders; "and I ain't going to burn my fingers with his affairs."

The Baby had no desire to hold long conversation on the subject of the possible marriage between these friends of his. He did not wish that in days to come Sir Victor should hear from mutual acquaintance that "Claude had said"—anything! It might not be pleasant, for if these contemplated nuptials should be ratified, the days to come would be aught but clear, and he felt that it would be as well not to be known as one of the causes from which had resulted such murky effects.

He had no personal ill-feeling towards Sir Victor Cleeve. No malevolent desire to see the young baronet aught but happy and prosperous actuated his mind. Still in obedience to the first law of nature, self-preservation, he felt bound to immolate Sir Victor on Miss Michel's shrine. She imperatively demanded a holocaust, and his career was too dear to the heart of the Baby to be sacrificed to a worthless woman. So he resolved to offer Sir Victor in his stead.

But he had no more personal ill-feeling towards him than had the often-adduced fox to the amiable goat who assisted him out of the well. Claude had enacted the part of reynard, and stepped through his friend's intervention out of the mire himself. But if he now went back to return the kindness, his future case would be worse than his former one. He could not face the danger and disgrace.

He assailed his conscience by telling himself that Sir Victor Cleeve would never know the full worthlessness of this woman whom they had planned he should wed, and that therefore it would not be such a bad thing for him as it would have been for the Baby, who did know what he called "the worst of her." Nevertheless, though he assailed his conscience, he desired to hold as little conversation on the subject as possible before the marriage was a "done thing."

CHAPTER XXIV.

AN OFFER OF MARRIAGE.

MRS. MITCHELL and her daughter were getting despondent in reality over their cups of tea, before Sir Victor put his resolution into execution, and called upon them. They began to fear that Blackman had exceeded his orders, and spoilt, by his offensive manner, Lucille's plan of action.

"We had better have left him with what Claude had said to settle on his mind. Uncle always was a fool," Miss Michel observed sharply; and her mother sighed nervously, and answered that she knew it.

"Then, why in the world did you insist on his going, mother? The game's all up if this night passes without his coming, and I have no hold on Claude, after going so far with this affair. What *are* we to do?"

"'Eaven knows," Mrs. Mitchell replied piously; she had a large pile of buttered toast before her, and could not trouble herself to speculate deeply about eventualities.

"Heaven doesn't care very much, I'm thinking," Lucille said, with a scoffing laugh; "it's all very well for people who are well off to put their trust in Providence, mother; faith is a capital institution when you've something else to depend upon; but if we don't look out for ourselves, we shall go to the wall for all heaven cares."

There was enough truth in these sentiments to crush

out the spirits the hot toast had temporarily revived; but Mrs. Mitchell's miserable moods were transient—few things had the power to gloom her long, especially at meal-time. She looked at her daughter in a deprecating manner for a minute or two; she then ventured a short verbal appeal to Miss Lucille's better nature on behalf of her 'poor old mother,' and on the young lady giving vent to the impatient "tshaw" of abstraction and deep thought, Mrs. Mitchell returned to the charge on the toast with revived gusto and redoubled appetite.

She had expected him and been prepared for him all day, had this strolling player with the haunting eyes and the horrible surroundings. She had thrown an old torn lace shawl partially over her head and around her shoulders, and the effect, despite the tears, was very fine.

Thought, anxiety, and judiciously applied powder, had given a pallor to her cheeks and an increase of power to her eyes. She looked as great a beauty as she had done on the previous day. But it was beauty harassed and in obvious distress.

Sir Victor Cleeve came at last, looking and feeling—well, any man who enters a house with the design of making an offer of marriage before he quits it, can imagine how Sir Victor looked and felt on this momentous occasion.

He was led on by all sorts of mixed motives (amongst which stood paramount the desire to do what was right towards this girl who had been traduced through him) to ask Lucille to be his wife. But for a while the idea of the absurd incongruity between Mrs. Mitchell and the present inhabitants of The Chase, swayed him from his purpose.

They knew him safely their own the moment he entered. Being what he was, fraught with what Lucille herself termed "a green boy's feeling of honour," he could only come for one end. They knew this, and therefore they bided their time, and suffered him to go gently over the ground that he scarcely knew how to travel. Mrs. Mitchell experienced more difficulty than

her daughter in controlling all outward and visible signs of impatience ; but the knowledge that her child would resent any marring of her plans with force and heart and heat, enabled her to repress such offensive manifestation of feeling as she might otherwise have indulged in.

They were going away in a day or two, they told him ; going to hide their heads—and work for their bread, somewhere—God alone knew where ! And when Lucille had given one convulsive sob, and Mrs. Mitchell one colossal sigh over this prospect, Sir Victor took the leap—and brightened it.

She was a clever woman, and she had not the most remote intention of losing him through the betrayal of over-anxiety to secure him. “ Give me till to-morrow to decide,” she said ; “ the events of yesterday have upset your judgment—perhaps you will think differently to-morrow.” And then she clasped her handsome hands, and drooped her handsome head, and added in a tone that thrilled him, that “ it was *not* for time for reflection to be given her that she pleaded, but for him—he might regret his impetuosity ;” and he of course immediately reiterated his proposal, and the fond parent felt that she might now with safety strike in with the speech she had been longing to make all the evening, relative to a woman's reputation being “ brittle as glass—and not as easy to mend—though now, through his noble goodness, her child's was pure as the snow, and soon would be known as such by the world.”

His plan was that they should go to town at once, on the following day if they liked, and be married without further delay. But she, remembering that he was a minor, and that a difficulty might arise in procuring a licence without his guardian's consent, put her veto on his plan with promptitude.

She placed it before him with considerable tact and skill. She was lacking in the innate refinement which studiously avoids giving offence. But this want was balanced by her consummate wariness. Her deceit taught her to counterfeit delicacy.

“ No,” she said, “ I will not consent to an immediate

marriage. And in order to assure myself against the promptings of my own heart, which will incline me to listen to your pleadings, I will go to some little village near and have our banns published regularly. That will oblige you to wait, and give you time to think."

He objected most decidedly to this course being pursued; and small marvel that he did so. It is surely enough to curdle the blood in the best regulated veins, to hear oneself described aloud for three consecutive Sundays as a "bachelor," or "spinster," to a body of people who are earnestly requested to state whether they know any impediment to one's perpetrating the advertised step. But his decided objections were overruled, and he was reduced to acquiescence in her proposed plan before he quitted her presence that evening,

Sir Victor Cleve was very glad to get away from the Mitchell lodgings, to say the truth. It may be that in the glow of feeling induced by the happiness of his unexpected position as the accepted lover of Miss Lucille, he ought to have been oblivious of minor discomforts. But it was not so. The room appeared particularly small, dismal, dirty, and uncomfortable on this occasion. Mrs. Mitchell appeared particularly odious as she sat simmering with satisfaction. The ceiling was so low that it seemed to come down and crush all the romance out of the affair. The practical turn the conversation took was offensive; for Lucille, though she affected to desire to give him time for reflection, spoke with more freedom than delicacy of what they should do when they were married. He caught himself looking askance at the beauteous being who had just promised to be his, and hoping that he should like her better when she was better dressed and better placed. She called him Victor, too! It was all right enough that she should do so, of course, for was she not going, at his own unbiassed solicitation, to be his wife? But he had not asked her yet to call him Victor, and it struck him that neither Madge nor Charlie would have been so familiar with any man on so short a notice. He was rather afraid *Madame* would call him Victor next, and he sat

nervously expectant of being so addressed, and somewhat unreasonably enraged at the mere dread of it. It was a sad frame of mind altogether for a man to be in who had just offered to bind himself for life to these not very remote causes of annoyance.

He went away finally rather hurriedly, so much so, in fact, that he left his great-coat, which he had just thrown over his shoulders when he came across, behind him, on the rickety sofa with the broken spring. He did not make the discovery that he had fled without his garment till about an hour after his return to his hotel, and it being then still early, he resolved to go over again and get it.

The sound of his knock caused dire confusion in the Mitchell *ménage*, for another visitor had arrived in the interim. And this visitor had to be disposed of summarily, Miss Michel being desirous of acting on the scriptural direction of giving offence to no man.

Lieutenant Claude Ogilvie had, in fact, come down from the camp actuated by the desire to find out how things were going on. He had discreetly waited outside (there was a *soupçon* of meanness in this discretion, it must be allowed) until Sir Victor Cleeve had withdrawn. On that event he had been quietly admitted, and promptly informed of the offer Sir Victor had made, and Miss Lucille's acceptance of it.

Now that it had come to this pass he did feel very much ashamed of his share in the transaction. In his earnest desire to save himself he had stabbed another man in the dark, and though he did not repent of his deed to the extent of deeming that it behoved him to attempt to undo it, he did repent him to the degree of wishing to avoid the sight of his victim.

"So you really mean marrying him?" he said to Lucille, when she had finished her communication. "Poor young fellow; poor devil!"

"You are barely civil, Mr. Claude—but I can afford to forgive you," she said in a low tone; and he replied somewhat savagely—

"Have I much cause to be civil, pray? You haven't

ennobled my nature to any great extent, or prompted me to the commission of a single deed that I shouldn't blush to see brought into the light of day. I haven't much to thank you for, Lucille."

"Go on," she said sneeringly. "You're always ready to sin with the worst and repent with the weakest, Claude Ogilvie; dozens of men have worse wives than I shall make him, if they only knew it."

The young officer's own moral character was far from spotless. He was lax in his life and language. He has been shown guilty of acting a lie towards his friend, and of urging in an underhand manner that friend on to dishonour. He thought little enough of broken hearts and faiths and vows, so long as it was by men they were broken. But he hated this woman for her avowed laxity, and for the disbelief she expressed in the virtue and honesty of other women. Once upon a time he had loved her after the manner of boys, for her big eyes and her handsome figure and arms, and her beauty generally. And now he loathed the very memory of that time—not because he was that rather mythical thing, "a reformed rake," but because he knew her for what she was, and void of all shame about it. He hated and despised her, and nearly despised himself for offering her such a holocaust as Cleeve; and he thought that could he but have lived the past few days over again, he would have acted a less base part than he had acted now.

Retrospective regret is useless ever; the past could not be lived over again, and Lucille through his agency would gain an honoured name, and attain unto an honourable position, both of which a ghost from the past might arise and tarnish any day. Claude Ogilvie had the feelings of a gentleman on this subject, though he lacked the courage of a gentleman to act upon them. He hated her vigorously, as he thought of the old name and the good estate whose fair fame was put in such dire peril through the machinations of this strolling player.

He was not pleasant to Lucille this evening, nor was she pleasant to him. When contempt puts the embers of love out, people rarely are pleasant to one another.

In one way it was a relief to both when a knock at the front door disturbed their acrid reflections and recriminations. And then the sense of relief expired in the birth-pangs of a sudden fear.

"That's *his* knock—he's come back for his coat!—See, there it is," she said hurriedly; and Claude Ogilvie sprang to his feet with an oath, and muttered—

"I *can't* see him—let me get out!"

"You must jump out—quick! from the back parlour window, if you'd avoid him," she exclaimed. *Do go!*—if he should find you here, what could I say to him?" She was as unfeignedly anxious to get rid of the necessity for an explanation of his appearance there, as Claude himself was to flee the face of his friend.

He went rapidly through the little back parlour, piloted by Miss Michel, who did not stay to see him effect his exit, however, but came back at once "to the fore," to close the folding doors and portray surprise at Sir Victor's reappearance. So the Baby went through the window with a light spring, unwatched, uncared-for, and alighted in the middle of a large stone tank full of water—the mistress of the house being a thrifty housewife, with a profound belief in the efficacy for cleansing purposes of what she termed "rainy water."

A frost had followed the thaw of the previous day, sufficiently severe to place a thin covering of ice over the top, and render the whole volume of water horribly cold. The force of his leap broke the ice, and his feet slipped upon it; therefore he came down nearly flat on his back to the bottom, and bruised his head against the end of the tank.

He was chilled to the centre of his being before he could struggle up and get a footing firm enough on the shining slippery stone to enable him to step out. And then he had to climb over garden walls with broken bottles on their summits, in his saturated clothes, and make his way in the dead darkness of a moonless February night, through the intricacies of the "back premises" of a but little known street.

It was an ignominious Nemesis this which had over-

taken Claude Ogilvie, and he resolved that no man should know saught about it, and that he would keep his own counsel as to the cause of his bruised head and cut hands. The next morning he got leave for a day or two, and went up to town to let the marks of his exploit wear out before his comrades questioned him about them. And when he reached town he was seized with rheumatic fever, which obliged him to remain. And so Sir Victor's last chance of being saved was lost; for Claude Ogilvie would surely have told the tale of Lucille's success to some one, who would have told it to some one else; and so, probably, it would have got round to Conway James's ears, and the "just cause and impediment" to the marriage would then have been found most surely.

They went off to a village some few miles distant from Aldershott on the following day, and lodgings were taken for the bride-elect and her mamma, and other lodgings for the happy man in order that he might be described as "also of this place." And Conway James's conscience was very clear, for had he not utterly routed the dangerous histrionic and saved "the boy," as he called him, from a detrimental *liaison*.

Captain James never once dreamed of such audacity as Miss Lucille's daring to attempt to marry the young baronet, who had not been permitted to fall in love with pretty Alice Lisle. He only thought that Victor might have fallen a temporary prey to a rapacious woman, and it would have "been a bad style of thing," and one to which he could not give his countenance. So he took credit to himself when some one mentioned to him that Blackman's company had gone—and then dismissed the subject from his mind entirely.

So time went on, and Victor kept his own counsel, and confided in none, and frequent intercourse with Lucille gave him a sort of acquired habit of seeing and talking in low tones softly to her, which stood for affection. She was very cautious during this brief period of their engagement, very quiet and thoughtful, more eloquent with her mighty eyes than with her tongue, and so if he did not get to like her more, he did not feel to

like her less. She asked him a great deal about his guardian and his guardian's family, And he supposed that was loving interest in him and his, which was in reality a keen resolve to know all about those with whom she would have to deal in the future. He had not arrived at the masculine reticent age yet, and he soon bared his bosom before her unwittingly. He told her about carrying the basket for Alice Lisle, and how pretty Alice Lisle was "not pretty like Madge and Charlie, but very nice," nevertheless.

"How do you mean? Not pretty like them? Are they better looking than Alice Lisle?"

"Hardly prettier, but with a *way* about them, especially Madge, that would show you they were ladies and no mistake, even if they had dairy-maids' dresses on," he said.

And when he said this, Miss Michel reflected with some satisfaction that she had portrayed the demeanor of royalty occasionally with great success, and that therefore Miss Cleeve's "way" would be as nothing to the one she could assume.

"Will they go on living with us, dear Victor?" she asked softly, and Victor turned such an unmistakably surprised look upon her, that she repented having put her question just yet.

"I hope so—I suppose so—unless they are tired of The Chase when the two years that my father wished them to live there are over. But I hope they won't be tired—I hope they'll stay."

If his marriage was to drive his cousins away, Sir Victor felt it would be a heavy sacrifice to duty and honour indeed.

Tuesday, the 3rd of March arrived, and his marriage was to take place on Wednesday, the 11th. And then his soul yearned for a confidant, and he sat down and made one of his cousin Charlie. He charged her to keep his secret, but he did not charge her to keep silence to him! And so when the days came and went, and no sign, no word, came from his home in the west, he felt sore at heart, and wofully disappointed. The golder

haired girl had seemed so frank and truthful, that she was the last he would have feared might forget him. He pined for a word from her wishing him well, or censuring, or upbraiding, anything would have been better from Charlie than neglect.

He did not tell this strictly private trial to his promised bride, and she saw there was a cloud on his brow, but like a wise woman she refrained from investigating causes. And so, unmolested by questioning, he passed the days away in wishing for a letter from Charlie, and driving Tom Tit between Aldershott and the little village where a congregation of the faithful had given the consent of silence to his nuptials with Miss Michel.

The early violets and early lambs were out by the time those machinations which had been commenced in January resulted in success. The winds of March and the dust of it are trying to the frame and temper, but for neither of these drawbacks to felicity did Miss Michel care, as she rose and looked out upon the rays that were gilding the dawning of her wedding day.

CHAPTER XXV

BAFFLED.

HAVING brought the principal actor in the drama up to the morning of the 11th of March, on which Miss Michel meant, fate willing, to marry him, it will be necessary to go back a few hours, and trace the progress of events at The Chase.

Madge awoke at five minutes to six on the evening of the 10th, released her sister's hand, and moved her head slightly with a gentle sigh of relief from the pain that had burthened it so long; and then the nurse substituted her own for Charlie's presence adroitly, in order that the sight of her sister might not call for too sudden a use of the but just restored reasoning powers. And Charlie, now the passionately prayed-for waking had come in its own time, threw patience to the winds, and went in search of her papa without a moment's delay.

"He will be in his dressing-room, she thought;" and to his dressing-room she sped with Victor's letter in her hand, and a desire for Victor's salvation, at any price, in her heart.

She knocked sharply at the door, and at the same time cried, "Can I come in, papa? I must!" and he came forward at once and opened the door, with a pot of walnut-pomade in his hand, and consternation in his face.

"What is it!—worse?" he asked, and the lips round which he had been training the well-dyed moustache with loving care but a moment before, trembled now with anxiety for Madge.

"No, better," she answered; "it's not of her I want to speak to you, papa, it's of Victor. Here's a letter from him to me; it's been delayed five or six days. It will tell you all you must do when you reach Aldershott; and you must start for Aldershott at once.

She was shaking with the long pentup excitement; but her words were clear and unfaltering.

"Is the girl mad?" Drummond Cleeve said; "he has got into some boyish scrape, I suppose, and you come to worry *me* with it—just like your poor mother; she always——"

"He's going to be married to-morrow unless you're there to stop it," she interrupted. "Hush, papa," she continued, as he commenced calling down imprecations on the head of every one whose name he could recollect at the moment.

"It's folly to waste time. I'll run down and see the horse put in the trap; and you prepare to start *at once*. You must save him—read the letter when you've started."

Her decision settled her father's nerves in a measure; he left off swearing, and finished dressing himself, and by the time he had done that she was back by his side.

"Don't stay to explain—I'll tell mamma about it. The trap will be ready by the time you can get down, papa," she said rapidly; and then, to her joy, he showed her that he fully appreciated the necessity for immediate action, by saying—

"The six train's lost—my God! I shall not get there in time;" and he pointed as he spoke to his watch.

"From this station—no! But, papa, drive to Linford; the eight o'clock train would stop there if a passenger shouted from the platform—the grey will do it."

"By God! the grey *shall*," her father replied; and then he gave her a hurried kiss and went down stairs, and away out to the trap, at a pace that proved he was warming well to the work which he had to do.

There was much amazement at The Chase when Drummond Cleeve did not come to dinner; and when Charlie partially accounted for his abrupt departure, Mrs. Cleeve elected to be offended thereat, and opined that he *might* have said good-bye to his poor wife, and kissed his innocent child before he went off so mysteriously.

And when Charlie said—

"He couldn't mamma; don't I tell you that Victor's in dreadful danger, that only papa can save him from?" Mrs. Cleeve rejoined,

"And so might baby be in danger, too. There's the spasms and the croup, to say nothing of my agitation, and either one might carry the poor infant off in a moment: but his death would be nothing, of course—oh! no. *He* isn't a baronet!"

The Linford Station was four and twenty miles from The Chase; but Drummond Cleeve had no particular interest in sparing a horse for which he had not paid, and he had a particular interest in saving time and Sir Victor. Consequently, "the grey did it," and the eight o'clock up-train was stopped at Linford for a single passenger.

Mr. Cleeve read the letter when he was seated in the railway carriage and on his way to its writer; and he waxed wroth over the perusal, and felt outraged as father, guardian and gentleman at the tidings that it told.

"He'd better have cut his throat," he muttered as he folded the letter up; and objectionable as suicide is on the whole, it must be conceded that there was a strong element of truth in that speech of Mr. Cleeve's.

"A strolling, painted Jezebel to be brought into the house that's never yet been polluted by a low-born woman's rule!—he'd better have cut his throat!"

It was some time before the comforting reflection occurred to him that in order to have procured a licence Victor must have deliberately perjured himself; he must either have sworn that he had attained his majority or that he had received his guardian's consent to his marriage.

"In either event it can be set aside," he thought; "and it shall be set aside. The harpy! I'll trounce her! I'll publish her! She shall be taught not to use her cursed wiles on gentlemen for the future!"

His rage at the stigma this thing would be to his house overpowered every other feeling nearly. He had not had time yet to think how sad his own plight would be should his daughter fail to win the husband and the protection for *him*, her father, that she had vowed to win. He had not had time to feel more than one brief pang of parental indignation against Sir Victor, for the latter having gone forth from the home adorned by such bright specimens of womanhood, to seek another bride. His self-interest and his paternal feelings had not had time to work and torture him yet. But his family pride, his sense of what was due to his race, this was alive and rampant; no space of time could be too brief to set this in a blaze. The other thoughts would come to him quite soon enough; but this for the early part of his journey was sufficiently distracting. His rage against the woman who was going to sully his name by taking it, and who had spoilt his dinner, waxed higher as the train puffed along, and he grew more hungry every moment. The beauty with the haunting eyes had been cursed by many a man during her career, but never more heartily than by this one, who knew not the full measure of her desert.

He had left The Chase dinnerless, and at his time of life—indeed at any time of life—hunger and the inability to assuage the pangs of it are not conducive to amiability. As soon as he had crossed the hall, odours of soup

and fish, and savoury roast and succulent *entrées* had been waited up, and, like all joys that but allure to fly, they rendered the state of the man who had to leave them untouched, untasted, worse than the first. The thought of dinner had retreated into the background during the drive to Linford ; but now, as he sat shivering in a railway-carriage through the long hours of a March night, it came back to him, and did not brighten his journey, at the end of which there would be found nothing to satisfy the appetite, grown weak with waiting, save the usual discouraging coffee and limp sandwiches. It was a long, miserable journey ; and when the Great Western terminus was reached, at six o'clock in the morning, Mr. Drummond Cleeve was in a humour to interrupt everybody's wedding if only the opportunity were granted him. The eleventh of March, the fair Lucille's own day, having dawned, Mr. Cleeve must perform the rest of the journey unnoticed, while we go back to Sir Victor and his bride.

Sir Victor Cleeve had taken up his abode at Dalemede the previous night, leaving his groom at the Aldershott inn to pack up his things, and convey them, Archimedes, and himself, by Wednesday mid-day to town, where he was to remain until his master met him. And when Sir Victor had given this order, he added a piece of information at which the groom expressed none of the surprise he felt, for he was a sharp servant, and desirous of retaining his situation.

"Lady Cleeve will be with me when I take you up at the Waterloo Station to-morrow, James," he said. "I haven't mentioned it, but I'm going to be married to-morrow."

Dependence makes people horribly sycophantish. James had lived at The Chase for some years, and was imbued with a well-paid servitor's reverence for the race that paid him well. He thought at once that the Lady Cleeve thus abruptly brought on the *tapis* would turn out to be none other than the Miss Michel who had received not too honourable mention in Aldershott. And he knew that if his supposition were correct, this marriage

so lightly mentioned by his young master, would be a lasting misery—a heavy thing to bear. He knew this, and he was sorry for it; but he was a dependent, and thus a sycophant. So he only touched his hat, and wished his master joy, and the lady too; “and no doubt you’ll have it together, sir.” And poor Victor thanked him, and had considerable doubt on the subject himself.

The morning dawned, and his doubts as to that happiness being his grew deeper and stronger. But it was worse than useless to be recalcitrant, now that things had come to this pass. He believed his bride to be all that she had seemed; his faith in her was unshaken, but his faith in her power to make him happy was gone—vanished for ever.

They were to be married at ten o’clock, and when the hour approached he went over to her lodgings, and found both mother and daughter in such unmistakable wedding garments that they startled him. Miss Michel had arrayed herself in a white moire at a guinea a yard, the bill of which she had directed to be sent to Sir Victor Cleeve. And on her head she wore a veil encircled by a wreath of roses and orange blossoms. Her mother was in pale green moire, a white lace bonnet with pink roses, and a white cashmere paletôt trimmed with pink plush, and half-fitting her figure. It must be conceded that it was a terrible preliminary trial to be compelled to walk to felicity through a gaping village-street and churchyard with such a pair. Sir Victor actually winced as he looked at his bride and reflected that he had no carriage there in which to hide her. For the first time the powder on her brow and the rouge on her cheeks and the red on her lips were apparent to him. He felt inexpressibly shocked: not so should a pure girl look on her marriage day.

“You are masquerading, Lucille,” he said; “you can’t mean to walk out like that?”

She flashed her eyes up at him angrily—“You wouldn’t have me go like a beggar, would you?” she asked. “Let your friends see, when they do meet me, that I looked like a lady on my wedding-day.”

He could not say, "But you don't!" which was what he thought. "The dress isn't suitable to the place or the way in which we are marrying, Lucille," he urged; "and I can't bear that stuff on your face—it makes you look——"

He paused. There was only one thing to which in truth he could have compared her, and the comparison would not have been complimentary to his promised bride.

"If I take it off now, I shall look as yellow as a guinea," she said. "I have had such dreadful anxiety lately, that it has spoilt my complexion. You'll have to put up with the powder, I'm afraid till I can get it back."

So she kept her powder on; and the clergyman who married them looking into her face when he was uttering the adjuration of, "Those whom God hath joined together let no man put asunder!" felt that there was something impious in asserting that God's hand was in such a work as this.

For she had won the day now—her hour of triumph was come, and she looked what she felt unrestrainedly. Her cunning composure vanished the moment she felt her safety, and in its place reigned a coarse satisfaction. And the man who stood by her side was quick to feel the change in her demeanour, though he kept his eyes away from her in sorrow and mortification.

"There's been foul work with that young fellow," the clergyman thought, as he preceded the pair to the vestry, where the book lay open awaiting their signatures; "there's been foul work, I'm afraid!" And a certain feeling of sorrow that he should have put the finishing stroke to it iced his bearing to the meretricious-looking bride, as she put the pen in her hand and indicated the place where her maiden name was to be written for the last time.

Her husband glanced at what she had written when she put down the pen—"Haven't you made a mistake, Lucille?" he asked; for he read "Lucy Mitchell!"

"No," she answered, laughing, "Lucille Michel"

was my stage name; "it's best to be married in my true one, for fear of accidents—you might get tired of me, you know." She laughed lightly as she said it, but she glanced keenly at him the while, and he knew that, whether he got tired of her or not, she was not a woman to be shaken off. She was amalgamated with his life for weal or woe for ever now.

They went down the churchyard together, Sir Victor and the new Lady Cleeve, and Mrs. Mitchell followed them closely in her green moire and aggressive motherliness. And as they gained the little gate at the entrance of the yard, a dog-cart containing two gentlemen drove up furiously; in one of whom he recognised Captain Conway James, and in the other Madge and Charlie's father, his guardian, Drummond Cleeve.

"Too late!" Conway James exclaimed, placing his hand on Mr. Cleeve's shoulder. "It's a done thing, however it has been done."

"Too late!" Drummond Cleeve repeated savagely. "Damn her, look at her!—is she a woman to bear the name?"

"Unquestionably not," Conway James replied; and then the pair passed them, and the three men took off their hats to one another.

"The man who married them shall be unfrocked, proclaimed as the mercenary miscreant he is," Mr. Cleeve muttered, as Sir Victor and Lady Cleeve passed on. And then Captain Conway James suggested that Mr. Cleeve should go up to the church and speak to the threatened man before he proceeded to extremities.

The tale Mr. Desborough told them when Mr. Cleeve acted on Conway James's advice, compelled the guardian to alter his tone relative to the steps he intended taking with regard to his ward. He found that either the boy or the bride had baffled him, and that Sir Victor Cleeve had rendered it impossible for the laws of his country to save him from matrimonial perdition.

"I wish you could have been here in time to stop the service," Mr. Desborough said heartily. "As it is, there's nothing can set the marriage aside unfortunately,

therefore I can only hope," he continued, taking off his hat, "that Lady Cleeve may defeat all our prognostications and realize none of our fears."

It was clear even to Drummond Cleeve's enraged mind that Mr. Desborough could be neither unfrocked, disgraced, nor proclaimed, as he had said. It was also clear that Lady Cleeve was bound to Victor with all the security the laws of the land have devised for the safe holding of a minor.

"I'd rather have followed him to his grave than have seen this," he said with the greatest sincerity to Conway James. And the latter did not doubt him for an instant, for he remembered what Drummond Cleeve lost through the existence of the young baronet.

"No doubt you would," he replied; "but as you're not called upon to pay him that attention, you must consider what will be the next least unpleasant course to pursue."

"I'll go up to town and see a lawyer," Drummond Cleeve answered. "Putting every other consideration than propriety out of the question, it is still essential that such a marriage should be dissolved."

"But it can't be, my dear sir," Conway James said earnestly. And then his brow flushed a little as he added, "and before you see a lawyer, I should advise your seeing Miss Cleeve."

"Ah! Madge!" the father sighed. And then Mr. Drummond Cleeve reflecting that she was not "Madge" to strangers, added, "Miss Cleeve unfortunately can be of little service to me in this crisis; she is dangerously ill—so ill that nothing but the horrible peril this boy was in could have taken me from her. Poor Madge! if the letter had been to her instead of to my other daughter, she would have devised some plan by which this cursed business would have been obviated."

And when he heard of her illness, of the dangers that could move so cool a heart as Mr. Cleeve possessed, Conway James found that the memory of the flirtation that had brightened the hours of his sojourn in the little Devonshire village had not quite died out, and that

Madge Cleeve, if she willed it so, could supersede every other interest in life with him. He did not venture to recommend her father to go and seek her counsel in this family crisis again, for he feared that his tongue would turn traitor and falter at her name. But he did venture to suggest that Mr. Cleeve should take no idle steps towards a painful and futile publicity.

"No legal power on earth can separate them if she behaves herself now—not even the exposure of her antecedents, of which by the way I know nothing, only I don't imagine they're too bright."

When Mr. Cleeve was about to step into the carriage on his way back to town he remembered that he had been making Captain Conway James very useful for the last three or four hours. The obligation was upon him to recognise this usefulness.

"Whether we remain at The Chase or not I shall always be happy to receive you as my guest for as long a period as you can come," he said.

And Conway James thanked him as cordially as his pleasure at the prospect of being in the house with Miss Cleeve and chagrin at the prospect of Miss Cleeve being in the house with the late Miss Michel would permit. Little as he knew of her antecedents, he thought there would be contamination to those girls in the presence and society of her ladyship.

So Drummond Cleeve went back to The Chase baffled in his attempt to save his ward.

"Too late!" he said, as Charlie went forward to meet him. "And I ask you what on earth are we to do now? This boy's cursed folly has——"

"Go from here as soon as Madge can be removed, papa," she said; "we cannot stay in Victor's house now Victor has married." And at the word her self-command gave way, and she put her hand hurriedly up to her face, to conceal the flushed tearfulness of it.

"Madge is better—poor dear, she's out of danger now, papa—but she must not know this yet!"

"No, she must not know it yet," I suppose, he said complainingly, "though her opinion as to what we ought

to do would be worth much to me now. It's always the way, always."

"We can do but one thing, as he is married, papa," she said, gently, "leave him to his fate and pray that it may be a happy one."

And then her father told her "That it was all very well for her to talk maudlin sentimentality, her poor mother had invariably aggravated him by doing so when he could least bear it. As to praying that his fate might be a happy one, it would be impious, absurd, and undutiful in the extreme if she did anything of the sort. And where, he asked her again, *where* were they to go if they left The Chase?"

Fortunately, Mr. Drummond Cleeve did not wait for an answer, for Charlie was not prepared with one. He went away to distress his wife deeply by betraying unmitigated dissatisfaction with the existence of his son. And Charlie went to sit with Madge and think of the bursting of the bubble.

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHEN MADGE WAS TOLD.

"MADGE must not know this yet," Charlie had said, when the grievous tidings of what had befallen them were told to her. And as day after day rolled on, and Madge remained still ill and helpless, but imperceptibly strengthening, Charlie repeated this caution to herself, and gave anxious consideration to the subject of when and in what words it should finally be told.

It was essential that the form of communication should be settled soon, for a letter had arrived from the young baronet to his guardian, informing the latter of the marriage officially, and stating his intention of returning to The Chase with his bride on the tenth or eleventh of April. Before this return Madge must be told; indeed, Charlie felt that before this return it would be well for them all to be clear away from The Chase.

Miss Cleeve was considerably gentled by her illness. The loss of vitality softens the manners through softening the muscles frequently. When the blood flows feebly it is very easy to trim one's sails in conformity to the prejudices of the subdued. Miss Cleeve had gone through the valley of the shadow of death, and its tender gloom was upon her still. The physical weakness of convalescence caused her to appear more strangely patient of all things.

But Charlie knew that her sister's pluck, pride, and purpose were not dead, but sleeping, and that as soon as she had more health they would reassert themselves with all the old determination. Chagrined as she was herself at Victor's folly, wofully concerned as she was for Victor's fate, she shrank from the volume of reproach and ire that Madge would pour upon the head of the cajoled boy when she should at last be told what he had done.

The days wore on, and March went out like a lamb, and April came in smiling sweetly through sparkling tears, like a deceitful woman. Madge was much better, and Sir Victor was coming home on the tenth or eleventh with his bride. Charlie felt that it would be unsafe to defer her communication any longer.

Madge was sitting up for the first time in a chair that was placed near to one of the windows, near enough for her to look through it with ease, away over the broad land studded with ancient timber, that sloped away from The Chase.

The position was conducive to amiability and general contentment with this world. There was the view, a beautiful one, and when she was weary of the view, there was a little stand on her right hand supporting a fair quantity of hebdomadal and monthly light literature, and another little stand on her left supporting various invalid delicacies. And when these failed, there was her graceful sister ready to wait upon, listen, or talk to her.

Miss Cleeve evidenced some of the amiability and general contentment that the position was calculated to engender and call forth.

"How beautifully thick my hair will be after being cropped in this way, Charlie!" she said, taking up a hand-glass and passing her fingers through her short, shining locks; "do you know, I find it very becoming, all brushed back and left loose in this way. I see now, that, as you once remarked, it is very much like Victor's hair, Charlie; it has just that same shade at the tips; it's regular Cleeve hair. If I parted it on one side, I might pass for Victor's sister very easily."

Charlie began to shake at the mention of Victor's name. She rose abruptly to stir the fire, for she felt that her brow was crimson, and that her eyes were full of tears. It was not solely on Madge's account that she dreaded telling the tale of Victor's marriage.

"What a lot of life the sort of illness I have had takes out of one," Miss Cleeve went on presently; "if I'd had it in Sloane Street, for instance, I believe that I would rather have gone to my grave than have taken the trouble to come back and 'take up the burden of life again.'"

"I should think you would have had the sense to reflect that life wasn't all Sloane Street: nothing goes on for ever! If it had not been for this Chase episode we should have quitted the neighbourhood of the pump in due time, I've no doubt."

Miss Cleeve laughed.

"You dear little bright-haired philosopher," she said; "your strong-mindedness wont put me out to-day, because I'm so delighted with things as they are, that I can be tolerant to the past. Why, I could bear baby in the room to-day—give my love to mamma and tell her so—for I know I needn't bear him in the room unless I please; but if we had been in a fusty room in Sloane Street, still—Well!—I wont say *what* I should have thought my little brother's existence."

"Madge," Charlie said, coming right up to her sister, and speaking very fast; "when the ship is under fire, it's the officers who have to stand up; the men may shelter, and nothing be thought of it. But there would be a stain on the gentleman who bobbed under a bulwark to avoid a shot—wouldn't there?"

"Yes," Madge replied, looking earnestly at her sister; "it's the prerogative of those who are well born to bear the brunt of the battle without flinching."

"And so with life," Charlie said, eagerly. "I needn't shrink from telling what you may not shrink from hearing. We must go back to the old career—we must leave The Chase, for Victor is married."

The blood that had been flowing lazily and feebly a moment before, came up with a hot rush and flooded the brow and the cheek, and even the throat of the girl who listened to these words, and heard in them the downfall of her dearest hopes. Then it ebbed away again with almost equal rapidity, and Miss Cleeve shook herself as a high-couraged horse might do after the receipt of a sharp blow, and said—

"I'm weak still; I told you that this sort of illness takes a lot of life out of one. Just tell me all that is to be told, and don't mind my not speaking; out with it all—all that has happened while I've been lying here a helpless, useless wretch."

The shock had imparted a fictitious vitality to the exhausted frame, and with its brief return vanished the patient, gentle tenderness which has been recently remarked upon. The old fierce spirit of defiance was raging within her as she poured out her command and self-denunciation.

Charlie told all she knew as succinctly as she could; but there were several drawbacks to lucidity and terseness. She could not "out with it all" without considerable agitation, and for more than one reason she shrank from this agitation becoming apparent to her sister. That young lady was betraying quite enough of it for the whole house of Cleeve.

"I think—I have said so to papa—that the only thing for us to do now is to get away from here as fast as we can," Charlie wound up with, looking interrogatively at her sister, and Miss Cleeve turned her eyes away resolutely and made no reply.

"Papa feels that this marriage is wrong, and Victor himself feels that it's weak—I'm sure of *that* from his

letter—so we had better part in peace and not stay here to create a feud. Hadn't we, Madge?"

"Papa accepted the guardianship on certain terms; he must fulfil those terms while his guardianship lasts," Miss Cleeve answered in a low voice. "If his wife likes to make our presence a cause of feud she must do it. I shall advise that my father remains."

"Oh! Madge, you can't be so——" Charlie began, and then she remembered that her sister had been very ill, and must not be excited unnecessarily, so she halted abruptly, and concluded the reproach with a look.

"I can't argue with you, Charlie; don't worry me by propounding impossible theories of right-doing now. I tell you we *can't* leave The Chase, hard as it may be to stay here and suffer the presence of that hateful woman in the house—we must stay and suffer it," Madge said; her words were determined enough, but her tones were tremulous, and her manner was not the manner that was usual to Miss Cleeve.

"I won't argue then while you're so weak, dear," Charlie said affectionately; "but, all the same, I feel we ought to go."

"And to what place pray, Charlie? Before you urge papa to deprive himself and us of a home, you should be prepared with another to offer him. You talk like a child! You forget that we are paupers if we quit The Chase; you forget the vow I made to my father for us both when we were coming here?"

"No, I don't Madge; I loathe the memory of it. It's the cause, I believe, of all this misery; but you must forget that oath now. You can never carry it out—you must never wish to carry it out again."

"I am not swayed so easily," Madge replied, "and, at any rate, I am not going to run away from an unseen foe. It can't be all right about this woman, or she would never have stolen into the family in such a way. We don't know what the end may be; and I choose to wait for it here."

The feeling of distrust that had lain dormant during Madge's illness rose in Charlie's breast as her sister

spoke and announced her resolve to wait for the end in the house she had sworn, under such different circumstances, never to quit. What end, that might enable them to dwell there lastingly in peace and honour, could come about without causing woe and shame to Victor?

"It's Victor's affair, not ours, whether all has been quite right about Lady Cleeve, it seems to me," she said quietly. "Don't forget, Madge, that any pain and exposure to her will be pain and exposure to him now. If your love for him," she continued hotly, "is worth the name, don't forget *that*."

"I think I will lie down for a little time," Miss Cleeve replied hurriedly; "you needn't stay with me, Charlie—and don't let nurse come in till I ring the bell. I shall sleep better if there is no one in the room."

"Very well," Charlie replied, as she helped her sister to the side of the bed. But, though she spoke and assisted Madge with the utmost gentleness, she felt that their last few words to one another had added a good many bricks to the wall of distrust that had been raised between them since their residence at The Chase.

She thought, when she was away alone thinking undisturbedly over the interview, that Madge had shown nothing but selfishness and callous indifference throughout it. "She only cares about The Chase, not about *him* at all," she thought. But she would have altered her verdict could she but have seen Madge at the moment. Whatever selfishness there might be, there was no callous indifference in the sobs that would not be stifled on the pillow, or the sorrowful moaning that would burst at intervals from the heart that she had given to this cousin of hers who had not cared to claim it. The necessity for self-command being over, and Miss Cleeve being alone, she bewailed herself as piteously as the weakest woman could have done under the like circumstances.

The tidings of Sir Victor's marriage got abroad before he came home to bear the brunt of inquiry about his bride himself. A great many people called at The Chase with the laudable intention of hearing all about it. But

instead of the fondly anticipated "all," only enough was heard to whet the curiosity of the whole neighbourhood, and make it cruelly anxious to see and judge for itself whether it should know her or not. Mr. Cleeve took the same stand as outsiders precisely. He professed the same utter ignorance, and hoped that the mystery was the only thing against the match. Had he done otherwise, he knew that people would have thought that it behoved him to remove his young daughters from the house of which the suspected lady was going to be the mistress. As it was, he draped the mantle of charity about himself gracefully, and posed with safety amongst the folds of it, thinking no evil, and hoping for the best. For Madge had had a long interview with her father, and Drummond Cleeve had come out from his daughter's presence fully determined on holding his position at The Chase while it should be tenable on any terms.

Charlie had made one forcible, honest, earnest protest against this decision when she was informed of it. "Papa," she said, "there will be such misery if we stay—it can't be otherwise. I feel that it's wrong to remain. I know that it will be neither for our happiness nor Victor's. Don't be led away by Madge, papa—do, do, dear, listen to me, and, for the sake of all of us, leave this place."

In these words, backed and supported by pleading gestures and supplicating eyes, had Charlie Cleeve made her petition to her father. And her father had been moved to rage, but not to relenting, by it. So had her poor mother always wearied and worried him, he told her, when weariness and worrying were peculiarly baneful to his system. Her disregard of the onus that was upon a child to listen, tremble, and obey, reminded him forcibly of her poor mother's disregard of his right to her implicit obedience on more than one occasion. As to listening to Madge or to her, or to anybody else, he had done, and he should do, nothing of the kind. He had listened to the dictates of his judgment and conscience, and these told him that his duty was to remain and make the best of things.

"For yourself," Miss Charlie interrupted, and then she repented her of this burst of irreverence to her parent, and added; "forgive me, papa, but it won't be good for anybody else, I fear," and then she looked him in the face bravely, though she was blushing; I know it won't for me; shall I tell you why?"

And he, the polished gentleman and devoted father, said—

"No, my dear, I never like to force a confidence, it's bad taste; your motives are doubtless admirable, but they're better kept to yourself."

"I won't trouble you with them again, papa," she answered sadly. And from that day Drummond Cleeve had a reprieve from his youngest daughter's solicitations to quit.

The hour of the return of the master of the house arrived, and the family were assembled in the drawing-room, expecting it momentarily. There was to be no glad going forth into the ball to welcome him, as there had been on a former occasion; all was to be coldly decorous—nothing more.

Madge was down for the first time, looking handsomer and more composedly high-bred than ever. But for all her enforced composure, there was a bright light in her eyes and a hot flush on her cheek, that Charlie saw and read aright. The late Miss Michel would have to tread carefully and 'ware of tripping in the slightest, if she would pursue her path scathelessly before the eyes of this young lady, who sat awaiting her advent with such apparent composure and indifference.

They came in at last; he altered, aged, grown better and more thoughtful looking in a way they could not fail but mark. And she, leaning upon his arm with an air of possession that roused all their antagonism at once; and with her huge, haunting long-lidded eyes, in such force, that they could not fail but mark them also, and think them beautiful.

He said little, and what he did say was in quite a different tone to the laughing, ringing, boyish tones they

were so familiar with. These were equally musical, but they were lower and deeper.

He mentioned each of his cousins by name to his wife, and they each put out a hand to her, and said something small and civil. And then he took Madge's thin hand and raised it to his lips, and told her with a loving sorrow in his eyes how grieved he was for her evident suffering and illness. "But it's over now, and we shall all be as we were before"—he began, and then he paused; and his wife laughed rather superciliously.

Lady Cleeve was convoyed to her room presently, and then Victor turned to his guardian—

"I was wrong not to consult you about the step I have taken, sir," he said; "it was from no desire, though, to throw off your authority that I didn't do so, but simply because if I had I should not have taken this step at all; and I thought I was doing right."

"We must hope for the best," Mr. Cleeve said, shrugging his shoulders. "I don't scruple to tell you that if it had been possible I should have had the marriage set aside. As that's impossible, I have made the best of it by allowing you to bring her here—I mean, by allowing my wife and daughters to remain here to receive her."

"He's not much in love with her, or he would fire up at that," Madge thought; and "Poor Victor! how unendurable his life will be with a wife that he'll let any man speak in that way of a month after his marriage," was Charlie's reflection. "We can't live in this way long."

There was a pause of confusion for a moment or two when Lady Cleeve came down again and dinner was announced. The late Miss Michel evidently expected that Drummond Cleeve was going to offer her his arm, and Drummond Cleeve had as evidently, to those who knew him, no such intention. Miss Cleeve speedily obviated the difficulty in her own careless, effortless way. She rose and drew her shawl a little closer, with a shudder at the cold she did not feel, and said—

"While I am an invalid, papa is good enough to give me his arm; but usually we do not stand upon the man-

ner of our going," and then she led the way out of the room with her father, Lady Cleeve following sketchily with her husband and Mrs. and Miss Charlie Cleeve.

There was no hesitation in Lady Cleeve's manner, however, when they reached the dining-room. Without waiting to have it offered to her, she took the head of the table at once, as the right of Sir Victor's wife. She showed them, unmistakably, that she knew herself to be mistress of The Chase.

CHAPTER XXVII.

LADY CLEEVE'S FIRST APPEARANCE IN PUBLIC.

SHE turned things topsy-turvy in a trice, this new Lady Cleeve, who had koo-too'd to her Moor and submitted to being smothered with such touching resignation. The standing order of things at The Chase did not please her; therefore, she altered it with a strong hand; and Madge Cleeve had to accept the alterations, and bide her time for reasserting her sway.

The transformed Miss Michel had this dramatic merit at least—she had the power of rapidly conceiving her part, and of acting thoroughly up to her conception. At the little country theatres at which she had figured for any number of years, critics had been carried away by her eyes and arms, and had been kind. They had been wont to praise the rapidity, and utterly ignore the lack of all artistic touches which she sacrificed to this quality of haste. So now she came to her new position quite prepared, she thought, to fill it. She had stamped a queen and sailed a countess on many a stage; but she had not learnt that to fill the less onerous post of gentlewoman it is necessary to be one. Consequently, her conception, though rapid and well acted out, was not a meritorious performance.

If life could have been all bowing to an applauding auditory, and clasping a bouquet to her bosom with a pair of magnificent arms, Lady Cleeve would have passed

muster very well. But in the new society in which she was placed, the things that she ought to have done, and the things that she ought not to have done, though well marked off from each other to an accustomed eye, got mixed up together in her mind. She often elected to do the one when the other would have been more becoming.

She was possessed, as has been seen, of plenty of rough-hewn tact. She could cajole men, and round off unpleasant facts, and seem other than she was at a little distance and under a well-managed light. But she failed when broad effects were not required ; and if put to the test, she could no more *intrigue* successfully against Madge than she could emulate that young lady's power of being pleasantly excited and showing that she was so without being boisterous.

I have purposely refrained from following them on their wedding tour. There would have been something painful in watching the dissolution of the few illusions that had been his on his marriage-day. He was fast gaining a full and true knowledge of her whom he had chosen to be his wife. And the man, whose bright, unclouded boyishness was enlarged upon but just now, was as miserable as youth and perfect health ever can be.

He stood aloof, and took no part in the battle for supremacy between his wife and Madge. For he had come home with his bride fraught with the determination to do nothing that might accelerate disunion. Added to this determination was the knowledge that his sympathies were not with his wife in the struggle, but with the well-bred young lady, who dealt heavy blows with a light hand gracefully, and said sharp things with a perfectly-modulated voice. And he knew that his sympathies ought not to have been with his bright, beautiful cousin, since a congregation of the faithful had decreed that there was no cause or just impediment to his having and holding, loving, honouring, cherishing, and endowing with all his worldly goods the strolling player, who ruddled her cheeks, enlarged her eyes with belladonna, and did other reprehensible things.

There was but the coolest courtesy between the

youngest Miss Cleeve and her cousin's wife. Charlie involuntarily recoiled from a close contact with a woman who had tricked a man so many years younger than herself into a marriage. And this recoil was quite perceptible to one who had learnt to read her fate in faces that were not so expressive as the youngest Miss Cleeve's.

With Charlie there was, therefore, but the coolest courtesy; but between Madge and her ladyship there reigned a transparently-hollow friendship. For Miss Cleeve had a keen desire to gather aught that could be gathered relative to Lady Cleeve's career for any number of years previous to the 11th of last March. She talked to Lucille a great deal; and, in the heat of talk and the excitement of the novelty of her position, Lucille would let fall a name, or sketchily paint an incident from the past. And Madge was very clever at tacking these things together.

April grew to a close, and no one had called on Lady Cleeve. The season was wet, certainly; but what season is not wet in Devonshire? There had not been rain enough to damp any one's intention of performing such an act of politeness, had it ever existed. Two or three of the daughters of adjoining houses had come with the most particular and kind enquiries as to Miss Cleeve; but there had been no card left for the bride yet. A whisper had been heard in the land, in fact, and every one was waiting to see what every one else did before they committed themselves to even so much as a calling acquaintance.

The Lisles had come, of course; but as Madge remarked, "Their call is professional, and no compliment—the test of whether it means more or not will be when Alice comes over—for Captain James will have posted his sister up about Lady Cleeve, though he said so little to papa."

"Don't be always gloating over the fact of her being slighted!" Charlie said, with a heightened colour; "it's to him, as well as to her, that the offence is offered,—indeed, I am not clear whether it isn't to us all, since we have chosen to remain in her house."

Sir Victor felt the offence very slightly as yet. He had not a proper appreciation of the awful magnitude of the honour of a call. People came to the house still, and it seemed to him a matter of small import for whom they asked, and into whose room they were shown. But Charlie, though she recoiled from his wife, resented the slight that was offered him through her.

It was a duller life than Lucille had anticipated leading as the wife of a wealthy young baronet. Her husband was cold as ice to her; but for that she did not care. There was monotony at The Chase for the woman who was with them, but not of them. Her ways were not as their ways, or her thoughts as their thoughts. She began to pine in her soul for the society of other men—for the broad flattery of other days—for the publicity which was second nature to her. She stagnated with these well-bred people, who sufficed to themselves and were perfectly contented and cheerful in their own society, when they had not that of others.

Lady Cleeve had arrogated the command of the house with rapidity, and the servants did not like her rule, and relaxed as ill-tempered domestics will when they are ill pleased, and gave the establishment the appearance of being badly managed. They talked of her paint and powder, and belladonna, in the village. When she went to say her prayers in her Sunday splendour, the whole congregation ceased from its pious meditations and concentrated its vision upon her, expecting a thunderbolt or some other heavenly visitation to descend and crush the glittering combination of vice and varnish. Mrs. Lisle (a good woman who never paltered with sin to the extent of being lenient to others) when questioned about Lady Cleeve by her acquaintances, shook her head, and observed that "*she* said nothing; oh, no, not on any account—but in her position *as* a clergyman's wife, who's duty it was always to think the best, which she was sure was what she wished to do in this case, &c." Lady Cleeve was not a luminary in the hemisphere of female honour and virtue, but she was not such a fallen star as the majority of Mrs. Lisle's acquaintances deemed her, after

one of that lady's speeches of charitable belief respecting her.

But Lady Cleeve would have cared little for the hard measure dealt to her by all the Mrs. Lisles in the world if the county people would but have taken her by the hand. As she said, in a letter to her mother, in answer to Mrs. Mitchell's offer of a visit, she "had had more fun in one hour behind the scenes at Woolwich than she had known all the while she had been at The Chase." She was very dull, very dull indeed.

At last there came a chance of a break in this dulness. Early in May there was to be a flower-show at Exeter, got up nominally to encourage the growth of flowers in the gardens, and a love of flowers in the breasts of the cottagers. The county magnates would all be there, for the purpose of saying that the horticultural produce of the peasantry was "very nice," and of looking at the produce of one another's greenhouses and conservatories. And as the Cleeves of The Chase had ever held a good place on the roll of county magnates, they were confidently expected to be there also; and much talk on the subject about and amongst them consequently arose.

Charlie Cleeve had carefully eschewed all private conversation with her cousin Victor from the day he came home to The Chase a married man. But whatever motive caused her to adopt this line of action she set on one side now, when the subject of going to the flower show at Exeter was first mooted. She said nothing in family council—the bright-haired, light-hearted young beauty had grown strangely quiet and subdued of late—but she followed Victor out into the old-fashioned garden that lay between the west end of the house and the stables, and said to him—

"If Lady Cleeve doesn't care about going, I'll stay at home with her that day, Victor."

"I don't know whether she cares about it or not," he answered; and then he added, "But why do you say it? Why do you make the suggestion of remaining away?"

She played nervously with her chain, and then stooped to pluck a spring flower and avoid his eyes. She could

not bear to tell this man, who had been very dear to her, that she feared his wife's first appearance in public would be the signal for their acquaintances to offer goblets full of the waters of mortification to him. She could not tell him this, and she could not bear to let him go and be so shamed.

"Why did I make the suggestion?" she said at last; "because I didn't want to go myself, I suppose, and wished for an excuse for remaining away."

He was in blissful unconsciousness of what she was endeavouring to save him from. He just put it down—this desire of hers—to a girlish freak, nothing more.

"I'm sure, Charlie dear," he said, taking the flower from her and placing it in his button-hole, "that I'd rather stay with you, for one, than go to the show. Lucille can go in the carriage with Madge—we'll stay here and have a jolly ride."

"No, we can't do that," she replied, blushing and shaking her head. "No, no, we can't; we can't, I tell you! You must go with your—with Lady Cleeve if she goes, Victor—but it's hardly worth going to, this flower show, I should think."

He no more divined her motive than the dog at his heels. She was striving to save his pride while she could. All her nature rebelled against the subtlety with which Madge was endeavouring to accelerate the disclosure of that popular view of his conduct, which should show him clearly how faulty and foolish that conduct had been.

"You've not been trying to persuade Victor against exhibiting his bonnie bride at the show, have you?" Madge asked when Charlie entered their own sitting-room a short time after. "I saw you in the garden with him just now, and I thought that the return to old habits boded a burst of something chivalric."

"I told him I wouldn't go to the flower-show if I were he—no more I would!"

"Did you tell him why?"

"Would I hurt Victor, Madge?"

"No, I don't think you would—but the truth must

dawn upon him sooner or later. Any one but Victor would have noticed various things before now; she's sharp enough. I believe that she feels a public view of herself offered to the county will be the only way of testing it."

"It shall never dawn upon him sooner through me," Charlie said, sorrowfully; "I can hardly bear it for him as it is, and he doesn't feel it yet. When he does—oh, Madge, surely you'll let it drop? You won't urge the going?"

"I wouldn't spare her a single stab if the moving of my finger would avert it," Miss Cleeve said bitterly; "don't let us quarrel about that woman, Charlie; she's not worth it—she isn't indeed; she's base, sordid, deceitful, and, for all I know, worse than that; let her go, let her be cut to ribbons if social knives can do it."

Charlie felt that she might as well attempt to mould a piece of granite into the semblance of something soft as to essay to turn her sister. To Lady Cleeve herself she could not speak on the matter. She had failed with Victor and with Madge; the only thing that remained for her now was to abstain from going to the scene of the operation of removing the scales from her cousin's eyes.

It has been said that the name of Cleeve was power in that neighbourhood; consequently the deeds of the young owner of it were not suffered to pass unquestioned and uncommented upon. There had been much conversation on the subject of the probable appearance of the baronet and his bride at this show; people looked forward to the opportunity of marking their sentiments with unction.

The day of the flower-show came, and the hour of the start from The Chase arrived, and then Charlie came down into her father's room without her bonnet, and announced her intention of not going. "And I think, papa," she said, in a voice whose steady firmness her pale cheek belied, "that you ought to prepare Victor for what Madge and you expect."

"I expect nothing," Drummond Cleeve answered;

"you're a very ridiculous girl, and I'm not at all pleased at your staying at home. I don't like this sort of thing myself, and I think that when I sacrifice my own tastes in such a way, my daughter might pay me the compliment of accompanying me. You're like your poor mother in that respect: she used to put me in very painful positions by wanting to go where she couldn't, and not liking to go where she could."

"Papa," she said, impatiently, "all this is nonsense, and you know it; it's mean to let Victor go unprepared for what you're going to witness. It's mean, it's cruel, poor boy!"

Mr. Cleeve shuffled nervously about the table amongst some papers and books.

"I wish you would be good enough to leave me, my dear," he said, mildly; "I'm really too busy to attend to your remarks now." And then, when Charlie obeyed him, by going out and closing the door with determination, he fell to wondering where this fresh young girl, who looked little more than a child, had learnt the worldly wisdom she so evidently possessed.

"She's had no experience, and yet how well she knows what must happen," he thought. And then he wished that she was going with him, for she was very lovely, despite the pallor, anger and sorrow had cast over her face.

But Miss Cleeve left his paternal pride little room to wish for anything else save her presence at his side in public when she came down dressed. She was going in the carriage with her father and his wife. Lady Cleeve was to be driven in Victor's mail phaeton behind a new pair of greys, by her husband.

"May's such a difficult month to dress, isn't it?" Madge said, with half closed eyes, to Lady Cleeve, when the latter entered the room prepared for the fray. And the remark called every one's attention to the difference in their toilettes, and made Victor feel enraged with Madge and ashamed of Lucille.

The beauty with the haunting eyes was not a daylight woman. No one could get herself up more effectively

than Lucille, but the effects were too broad and strong for the sun to suit them. She had determined on creating a sensation on this occasion, and that there was small doubt of her doing so every one felt who looked at her as she sat waiting for the carriages to come round.

She had whitened her brow and tinted her cheeks, and coloured her lips, and brought out her eyes with a vengeance this morning. She looked as gaudy, brilliant, and meretricious as a French print, and the satisfaction with her own appearance that curved her beautiful mouth, was painful for the man who was tied to her to witness. She had on a light blue moire dress, and a many-coloured cashmere, and a crape bonnet of the same hue as her dress, with a rosebush upon it. She swayed herself about in her shawl, and caused her dress to crease and float and trail about in a way that made these garments more aggressive things than they would have been on another woman. In a word, she looked vulgar by the side of the young lady who had remarked, "May's such a difficult month to dress, isn't it," and who had obviated all difficulty by attiring herself in black silk lace, and a bonnet of grey crape and blush rosebuds. The carriage containing Mr. and Mrs. Cleeve and Madge arrived first.

They were rather late in reaching the scene of the show; the tents were full when they entered, and the Countess of Uxborough and many other of the best and most rigidly-respectable people came forward to meet the Cleeves with *empressement*. And then, as they stood, a powerful social group, facing the entrance to the principal tent, Sir Victor and Lady Cleeve advanced, and many knives, fell with lightning speed, clear and sharp down, down into Victor's soul. The Countess of Uxborough went on speaking in the same tone of light badinage to Madge, and suffered not a gleam of recognition to cross her handsome face in answer to the lowly-doffed hat and salutation of the man whom she had petted and made much of when he came amongst them first. He turned from her to others—to a number of great dames and pretty, well-born girls—and these made no sign. He

glanced towards several men whom he knew, who acknowledged the glance by nodding and saying, "How do, Cleeve?" but none of them came forward for an introduction to the bride. He saw his own relations received, welcomed, treated on terms of closest intimacy by these people, whose dictum he was too well bred, too thoroughly one of them, to despise, and in his soul he cursed his marriage, for Lady Cleeve was cut by the county.

He did not tell himself that he did not care, and that this was a light thing and a trifle! No man in his position can be careless of or feel such a public slight to be light and trifling. It was a bad blow, and he felt it to be a bad blow, and in his soul he winced under it. But outwardly he was unstaggered by it! he was no plebeian cur to whine and howl and hang his head under the kick. The gentle blood in his veins—the traditions of the gentle breeding of his race—came to his aid now and enabled him to bear this cruellest blow that can be levelled at a man—the one that is aimed at the respectability of his wife.

He sought to meet no man's eye, after that first sharp questioning look around—nor did he flinch from any man's gaze. He assumed no debonair devil-may-careishness; nor did he give the many women present who had wished to marry him the satisfaction of offering a cowed countenance for their inspection. He had shone brightly but the other day, but they could hardly glory in the fall of a man who took the fall as did Sir Victor Cleeve.

Lady Cleeve felt her failure too. She was not a good woman, but badness affords an immunity from suffering. She felt her failure, and her trembling lips and wildly-flashing eyes showed the assembled operators that their weapons had gone well home. Once and once only during their progress through the tents did she speak, and then it was to say, "I'm sorry for you." And he, though he cursed his marriage, pressed her hand against his side in gratitude for the sympathy that she offered him in a way that took a portion of the sting out of the affair for her.

He could not turn and flee like a beaten hound from

the place where they stood holding aloft their faces of scorn. He could not do this, for the Cleeves never were good at levitating from anything that daring might carry them through. But there was no bravado in the manner in which he led his wife—the woman they were determined to tattoo and crush—through the tent that was thronged with the flower of the Devonshire aristocracy. He led her through with a firm step and a look that neither sought nor shrank from recognition. But he thanked God for it when he reached the other end.

There was but little said between the husband and wife during their drive home. He lashed his horses along at a fearful rate, and succeeded in getting them into a state that demanded all his attention. He could not ask her anything relative to the past! He could not question this woman whom he had married as to what that thing might be which had caused women whose integrity was unassailed to hurl these flints at her.

"Victor, I am sorry for you," she said, when they were approaching The Chase. "As for myself, I don't care," she continued laughing: "they're stuck up frumps that I shouldn't like most likely." And in answer to this assertion of independence he gave no gentle pressure to her hand. It revolted him that she should undervalue that, the withholding of which had made him feel himself a banned man.

"I know now why you wouldn't go, Charlie," he said, when his wife had retired to her dressing-room, and he was free to seek his cousin's presence alone; "thank you, dear—you would have spared me," he continued huskily. And then when she held out her hands warmly to him and spoke some inarticulate words of comfort, he bent his head down on her golden tresses and sobbed over the demolition of the honour of his name.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

A BAD COMPANION.

It will be remembered that Mrs. Selwyn James was left suffering from qualms of conscience for being there at all on the threshold of her cousin's door. She had somewhat abruptly refused her husband's request that she should go into Cambridge on a mission for him. And she had repented of her refusal after the brief burst of resentment which had carried her defiantly to Dora's house.

In her contrite frame of mind it was pleasing to her that she found Theodora alone. Mrs. Burroughes was discovered by her rather agitated visitor in a large Holland apron and sleeves busily employed in removing every particle of dust from the delicate china glass, and alabaster ornaments whose pristine purity she rarely suffered her housemaid to defile. Casual acquaintances who only knew Mrs. Burroughes superficially, pronounced her an "idle atrocious flirt." They never credited her with being the admirable energetic manageress and mistress that she was. For though she was not ashamed of her deft domesticity, she never flaunted it.

"I'm dusty and can't shake hands, Alice," she said, kissing Alice on the forehead. "I'm very glad to see you though, dear—you wont mind my going on with the room?"

"No," Alice replied, "not at all," and for the first time the secret of the exquisitely fastidious appearance of Mrs. Burroughes' drawing-room dawned upon her. "Aint you satisfied with your housemaid, Dora, that you're doing her work?" she asked presently.

"Oh yes, quite—as far as she goes—but I don't care to see my Dresden in her hands. I always keep this room myself, you know—don't you ever do such things?"

"No, never," Mrs. Selwyn James replied with a touch of contempt.

"Ah! well, I should if I were you—I couldn't sit in

a room that a servant arranged. I mean as to the little things. I'd as soon they arranged my vases of flowers as my other ornaments, they do it so stiffly." And then Mrs. Burroughes stepped back and musingly surveyed the result of a new combination she had just effected on the mantelpiece.

"Oh, I'm so dull that I don't care whether my rooms look nice or not," Alice replied pettishly. "I've no pleasure in them. I've no one to see them—it's different with you, you've always some one here or you're expecting someone."

"What is the matter now?" Dora asked.

"Selwyn has been so cross again—not so much cross as so—so—well, like he always is, you know, Dora," and the tears came into the young wife's eyes as she spoke.

Now Mrs. Burroughes had a great dislike to talking to wives about the errors and shortcomings of their husbands. She is not introduced into these pages as a model—she was not "a perfect woman nobly planned," indeed she was as imperfect as are most of the women one meets with in the realms of fact. But she was not ignoble—she never stirred a devastating fire—she never made things worse and harder to endure by talking them over. She was what is popularly designated a flirt; but she would have deemed herself guilty of a great sin had she ever done what many of her censors did unscrupulously—incensed a husband against his wife, or a wife against a husband.

So now when Alice James declared that Selwyn was not "cross so much as like he always was," Dora said that she thought Selwyn was always very nice, and didn't Alice think that that bowl arrangement of the hyacinths was charming!

And Alice replied with more depth, of feeling than she usually displayed—

"It's all very well, Dora; but some time or other you will all know that I did know what I wanted—at present you every one of you think I'm fractious from a surfeit of happiness."

"Have you quarrelled with your husband, Alice?"

Mrs. Burroughes asked, denuding herself, as she spoke, of the holland apron and sleeves; "if you have, I'm quite ready to go back and try to make matters smooth—but I don't care to have you remain here, making him think that I'm trying to widen the conjugal difficulty."

"No, there's been no quarrel—only he asked me to go in and see Philips about the grey, and because I didn't think doing his stable boy's work a boon and a blessing, and—and—said I wouldn't go, he got cross and huffy."

"And I don't wonder at it."

"Now, Dora, you know you wouldn't have done it any more than I. Mr. James doesn't know how to treat a lady," Alice said, throwing her head up in the air as she spoke.

"Oh, I see!—you thought there was something derogatory to your dignity in doing an errand. You're not used to being the wife of a country gentleman yet, you see, Alice."

"I ought to be used to the manners of a country gentleman, seeing that I am the daughter of one," Alice rejoined, stiffly.

"Clergymen go for nothing," Mrs. Burroughes rejoined, carelessly; "it's to be supposed that your father's heart was in his pulpit and his parishioners, not in his horses and dogs. I'll go with you to Philips now, if you like—don't let Selwyn think you silly and sulky, for you're neither—get over the notion of thinking that if your husband speaks to you about his horses he regards you no more than a stable-boy."

"I never had the notion," Alice said; "it wasn't what he asked me to do, but the way he asked it, that I couldn't stand."

"Well, I will go with you to Philips now, if you'll give me a seat—and then at dinner you can tell your husband that you've done his bidding. Come, Alice—shall we go?"

She spoke with the sweetest good humour. She was most sincerely desirous of seeing all things smooth and

straight between the ill-assorted pair who had come together in her house.

"Then, shall we go in at once about the grey?" she added, after a few moments' pause. And Alice acceded to her proposition because she had nothing valid to urge against it.

"You can't think how he dislikes you!—you wouldn't take his part so if you knew all he said about you," the too candid young wife said, when they were on their way to Cambridge.

Mrs. Burroughes coloured up fast and furiously—she was unaccustomed to being disliked and spoken ill about by men.

"He has no reason to do either," she said, coldly. And then she thought of some manifestations of anything but dislike and ill-feeling that Selwyn James had made in days gone by. She began to think that her cousin's husband was a poor-spirited, false-hearted, mean man. "He has no reason and no right to do either," she repeated more emphatically, and then the feminine demon got hold of her and urged her to ask, "What does he say about me?"

"Oh, not much," Alice replied, triumphantly. There had been times and seasons when the peachy-cheeked Devonshire girl had been made to sing small, as it were, by the side of the brightly-coquettish little woman, who won, without effort, the suffrages of mankind. Like the majority of sweet, soft women, she was as sour and hard as can be imagined when the opportunity of being so innocuously to herself offered.

"No, he can't say 'much;' but what does he say?" Dora repeated, and her colour did not decrease as she asked it. She knew well that of all men in the circle of her acquaintances, Selwyn James had least reason to speak or think lightly of her.

"He says—there, I know you wont take his part against me any more—he says that your house is too loose for me to visit at, and—"

"What?" Dora interrupted, too *what*?"

"Loose," Alice replied, with a feeble voice and a

frightened air, for her cousin had turned a face upon her that showed Mrs. Selwyn James that she had gone a little too far.

"Here stop your carriage," Mrs. Burroughes said, presently. "Now, no crying, Alice, that's nonsense. I'm not angry with you, only I advise, since your husband is such a base, cowardly blackguard as to try and blast a woman because the conduct of which her husband approves does not come up to his narrow view of what is right, that you keep his remarks to yourself for the future." And then Mrs. Burroughes got out of Selwyn James's brougham, and walked away back to The Oaks without another word.

She had been allowed the greatest liberty of action by her husband. He had suffered her to gang her own gate unrestrainedly. He had taken a good-tempered delight in the pleasure she gave to and extracted from others; and as he had never doubted, so she had never given him cause to doubt her. And here now the husband of one of her own tribe, the man to whom she had been uniformly and unboundedly considerate and courteous, denounced her as an unfit companion for his weak, untempted, untried wife, and described the house that in all honour she had striven to render pleasant, as loose. "The wretched, vulgar Pharisee," she said as she passed from the road into the sanctuary of her own grounds. "I'm sorry I was accessory to the marriage between them; it will end badly, if the opportunity for its doing so ever occurs."

Mrs. Burroughes was very savagely and naturally annoyed at the knowledge of the estimation Mr. Selwyn James held her in. Months ago, before Alice had been banished from Baysford at the behest of Drummond Cleeve, the hospitality of The Oaks had been freely offered to and accepted by this man, who now pronounced the mistress of it to be an unfit companion for his wife. More than this: he had blundered and presumed a little on the frank friendship she displayed towards him. And she had taught him that he had so blundered and on a proper exhibition of penitence and

contrition had forgiven his error. But he was what she had termed him, "a narrow-minded man," and he could not think kindly of her who had taught him he had so blundered.

But she had not forgotten it. A bright-natured, merry, laughing woman, she was possessed of very deep feelings, and some of these were aroused now by the reflection that the man to whom she had been so generous had proved himself so base as to essay to stab her in the back. "The wretched, vulgar Pharisee!" she repeated; "the rigidly-repectable sneak who has never been found out. I only hope that if some man should ever make love to his wife, she may give as little room for censure and evil-speaking as I have done. I hope it; but it will be more than he deserves."

She sat thinking over her career, and what was said about it, for some time after her abrupt return on that cold March day. She catechized herself severely, and anatomized her married life thoroughly, and she could but deem both blameless. She knew well that there had been a surface of frivolity, and she acknowledged that with a more loving, in fact, a totally different husband, this surface appearance should not have been. But there had been nothing deeper: under the surface it was all healthy and firm. She had a clear, strong head, and an honest, high heart, and these, despite her surface faults of frivolity and flirtation, had kept her from giving occasion for any man to speak or think ill of her. And so, after giving long and serious thought to her career, she came to the conclusion that she would not alter it because it had fallen under the stricture of Mr. Selwyn James.

But though she saw no reason for altering it, she saw great cause for preventing his wife from running it with her. "Every man has a right to choose his wife's associates," she thought. "I'd give up any one that Frank made a point of my giving up." And to do her justice, so she would. She had no special affection for her husband, but she had a full and proper appreciation of what was his due.

"He had no right to speak badly of me, but he has a right to choose his wife's associates," she said. And then she wrote a brief, clear note to Alice, saying that, for many reasons, until Mr. James altered his estimate of her, she would decline either visiting or receiving the mistress of Royston Hall.

She was not a deceitful or a cowardly woman—the two qualities usually go together. But still she shrank from making her husband acquainted with the cause of the total cessation of intercourse between the Selwyn Jameses and The Oaks.

"I never hear of Alice coming to see you now—hadn't we better ask them to dinner?" Mr. Burroughes said one day. And she waived the subject off, for she did not care to tell him that Selwyn James had cast a slur on the respectability of his home.

So Alice James, through her own ill-advised open mouthedness, lost the best friend she had in the neighbourhood of her new home. She was one of those women who are sieves when they should be reticent, and wofully reserved when there would be more safety in showing confidence. That is to say, she told everything that it occurred to her to tell about other people, and made little mysteries about herself in the wrong place.

Cut off entirely from The Oaks, she took, to her husband's great delight, to frequently visiting Lisle Court; and as Lady Lisle discovered that the Jameses "saw very few people," and the few they did see very solemnly and decorously, Ida was permitted to pass a good deal of her time at Royston Hall. The unfledged beauty was but a poor substitute for her brilliant elder sister; though she was full of the arrogance and intolerable conceit of raw girlhood, and she was fraught with a most refreshing and unmitigated contempt for all and everything that was not as lofty and grand as she had been taught to expect her own future would be. She came and amused herself at Royston Hall, and let its mistress perceive that she just did it to pass away the time till she could burst upon the world, and that when she came back after being presented she would be a

luminary in the county, and rarely, if ever, shine there.

"We shall go up to town about the same time, I suppose, shan't we?" Alice said to her one day; and Miss Ida replied—

"It won't make much difference. I shall have no time to come and see you."

"Selwyn will take a nice house for the two months we shall be there, and I'm going to give a ball. I must fix on a night when you'll be free."

"I shall never be free to come to a ball at your house!" Miss Ida rejoined, opening her eyes very wide at the idea.

"Why not?" Alice asked shortly.

"Oh, that's impossible, you know!" Ida replied. "How Eustace would laugh if he heard you! I shall only go out well."

Now all this was very high and mighty and agreeable for Miss Ida, but it was intensely disagreeable and mortifying to Mrs. Selwyn James. It is only Irishmen, whose claims to everything are mythical, who delight in extolling their family to their own individual disparagement. However, in the meantime, before Miss Ida had the opportunity of going out well, she was gracious and merciful, and by no means sparing of her visits to Royston Hall. And Alice was glad even of her condescending presence, since nothing better was to be had; and gradually the intimacy deepened, and the two cousins carried out some plans together, that Lady Lisle (whose reliance on Alice's "great good sense" was unimpaired) would scarcely have approved.

The man who deemed, or affected to deem, that there was something detrimental to his wife's purity and reputation in the society of the frank woman who received men openly in her husband's house and with his consent, was in blissful ignorance of these plans. Had he not been so, he would not have felt the calm of absolute security he did, in the substitute Alice had found for those reprehensible excitements at The Oaks. Alice was evidently settling down into a well-regulated matron,

full of household cares, instead of "requiring to be perpetually with Dora."

And so it seemed, in truth. Alice took to house-keeping so earnestly that she was continually making the discovery that she wanted some trifle for which she must at once drive into Cambridge, and with Ida by her side, her husband saw no manner of objection to her continually going. I have said before that hers was not a nature to dare, but to deceive, and she was deceiving both her husband and Lady Lisle at this epoch most cruelly.

These shopping expeditions were frequent, and the beautiful unfledged Miss Lisle, who was to win a coronet at least during the ensuing season, was always by her side. And into whatever shop the mistress of Royston Hall and her young cousin entered they were sure to be followed by Mr. Wynne—the young drawing-room buffoon of whom mention has been made before.

They never stayed long enough to excite suspicion, and they never suffered the servants to see the misguided boy, who thought that prayer and devotion might by-and-by win the Lisles' consent to his wooing of their daughter. She enjoyed it all in her thoughtless girlish way. She meant to marry a lord or a duke in the future, but at present she found it vastly pleasant to flirt with Mr. Wynne surreptitiously.

At the house from which she was sedulously kept, Ida would not have been suffered to encourage, and he would not have been suffered to offer, these attentions. Mrs. Burroughes would have checked her sister and put down the foolish pretensions of her guest with a kind frank speech and a steady strong hand. But Alice conceived that there was a touch of romance in the business, so she allowed it to go on, and talked to Ida about her own baffled young love and Sir Victor Cleeve. She with her pretty innocent face and bashful ways, and habit of being nervous and retiring, was thrice as dangerous a companion for the girl on whom so many hopes were placed, as was the brilliantly fascinating and brightly attractive woman to whom so many men offered adoration within bounds.

These sickly sentimentalities are humiliating things to look back upon! That woman is a poor creature who is ashamed to look upon the wraiths of the dead loves that she has had for men, or men have had for her. But the girlish, childish, almost first preference for the being preferred because he happened to be near at the time and told you that you were the object of his undying passion—this is a humiliating thing to look back upon. "Love's young dream" is pretty to sing about, but it is as absurd and full of incongruities as are most dreams.

Ida had not for some time the smallest real liking or regard for Mr. Wynne. But he was the first man who treated her like a woman, and Alice joked her about the conquest she had made. It imparted a *souçon* of excitement to her life to have him to talk about whenever she was with Alice. She repeated every word the young man said to her during the brief conferences they held together while Alice was at the counter. And gradually, as Alice capped everything he had said to Ida with something Sir Victor Cleeve had said to her, Ida began to wish he'd say a little more, and to urge him on to do so in the thousand nameless ways that come so naturally to the least experienced woman. She got to think that it would be a very great and glorious thing to break Fred Wynne's heart, or send that young gentleman into a lunatic asylum, or cause him to hang himself. She had visions of herself in Rotten Row in the fast-coming season, surrounded by everything "out" that was titled and eligible, bestowing a bow of pity and recognition on Mr. Wynne, who should be hanging in despair on the railings. She longed to make him jealous, and then have a stolen interview with him in order to tell him that "it never could be." She was full of folly and high animal spirits, and Alice encouraged her flirtation, and Miss Ida carried it on vigorously, till at last she burnt her fingers as children usually do when they play with fire. The patrician young beauty who was to do great things matrimonially began to think that she was in love with Mr. Wynne, and to let him think so too.

CHAPTER XXIX.

OUT ON THE TERRACE IN THE SUN.

CLAUDE OGILVIE came out of his illness at last with his eyes considerably enlarged, and with deep dark hollows under them. He was pale and weak and attenuated. As Madge Cleeve had said about herself, "that sort of illness takes a good deal of life out of one." His manner was uniformly lazy and languid now. In fact, he was in that state in which people are commonly described as being "sadder and wiser for" something. Which means that they are depressed and disgusted with what they have done, because they have suffered for it.

His had been a long and an expensive illness. It was February when he fell into the stone tank, and May sunshine dazzled and cheered his eyes when he was able to sit up and look out of the window. He had never served an apprenticeship to sickness. It was a novelty of an unpleasant order to him. Added to this his funds were very low, for the rheumatic fever had come upon him in a London hotel, and in a London hotel he had been compelled to remain while the fever lasted. His bones ached with the least movement, and his weakness and anxiety robbed him of a great portion of the beauty he by no means undervalued. No wonder that the Baby was sadder and wiser, *i.e.*, depressed and disgusted, when he sat up for the first time and looked over the items of the bill opposite to a large swing glass.

Two or three men had been to see him two or three times during his illness. But they were men whom he did not care to question on the Cleeve and Lucille topic. Indeed, those of my readers who have passed through the ordeal of a rheumatic fever will be lenient to any display of laxity of interest that he may have evinced regarding the matrimonial arrangements of his friends. But when he was enabled to sit up again and take thought for the morrow, he did begin to wonder how affairs had progressed between his discarded love and his whilom friend.

Lieutenant Claude Ogilvie had had time to think during his convalescence of divers unpleasantnesses that were lowering over him. He had got possession of his portion as a younger son years ago through the untimely death of his father, and it had all gone without the smallest reservation to those Shylocks who infest the path of any young profligate on the look out for a guide to perdition. His pay was small, his desires were large, and his conscience was surprisingly elastic. He gave bills that he knew he could never meet, and got honourable men to back them. And now the tribes of Israel were coming down upon him, and unless he could stave them off and save his too confiding friends there would be a stigma on his career thus early in it.

He began to desire tidings of Sir Victor Cleeve. He began to think that he might as well borrow the money of him.

It was from Conway James that he heard of the marriage at last. Claude's severe sufferings—the marks of which were upon him still—prevented Conway from giving voice to the suspicions which pointed to the Baby as an active agent in the affair. But though he made no accusation, he mentioned it seriously and gravely as a “bad thing and no mistake.” And Claude shook his head and looked solemn, and made no response.

“I heard from a man who's in the —th (the regiment then at Excter) that there was a regular *fracas* the other day at a flower show. Miss Cleeve out of kindness introduced her to the Countess of Uxborough—and the countess made a row—said she wouldn't remain in the same room with her.”

“Ha! awkward that!” the Baby said mildly. He did not like the topic his visitor had elected to broach, and he felt ruefully ashamed of himself and unwilling to meet Conway James's eye.

“Awkward!—it's awful,” Conway James replied, decisively. “Those girls—such nice girls too—ought not to live in the house with her. She's not a lady, to start with. How Cleeve could have been so confoundedly taken in, I can't imagine! In a letter he wrote to one of his cousins

about her, he actually went so far as to say she was a lady by birth, or some rubbish of that sort. Who could have told him such falsehoods about her? for, of course, he couldn't have been ass enough to go on her word alone."

Captain Conway James interrogated the handsome depressed invalid with rather a severe glance, as he asked, "Who could have told Cleeve such falsehoods?" And Claude's face flushed like a girl's under that glance.

"Look here, James," he said, rather deprecatingly; "I'm sorry he's married her—that's all I can say; but I can swear to you I only saw him once after his driving her to Reading, and then I didn't know he was going to make an ass of himself. How should I have known it? I came up to town the day after, and I have been here ever since, having as fair a taste of the rack as any fellow can have in these days. If I'd been down there he shouldn't have married her. Can I say more?"

"Not now—you might have said more before."

This was unanswerable, and the Baby held his peace for awhile; but presently he said—

"All I might say now would only make matters worse. People have got hold of something about her already; but that will die out after a time. I wonder if Cleeve would have me at The Chase for a spell. I must get into the country somewhere or other."

Captain Conway James looked at the young fellow rather more kindly. He was altered by this long attack of the fruit of fog and miasma. The old easy, insolent grace of perfect health and strength, and satisfaction with himself was gone. The bright beauty, that women loved and spoiled him for possessing, was clouded over. Conway James pitied the poor fellow for having gone through so much, with nothing more sympathetic than a chambermaid and a waiter about him.

"I thought you had a sister?" he asked. "I expected to hear your sister had been with you."

"So I have, but she's married and gone to India, poor girl! I've another—that is, my eldest brother's wife; but she thinks me a reprobate, and he's always afraid I

want to borrow money of him." She sent me a lot of tracts when she heard I was ill; but she wouldn't soil her saintly soul by coming in contact with me."

"I tell you what," Conway said suddenly, "you shall come with me down to Royston Hall, my brother's place, in Cambridge. He'll be very glad to see you; and he has a nice little wife, who'll make you comfortable. Will you come?"

His illness had made him very weak indeed. There were tears unmistakably in the eyes of the friendless young fellow, whom women petted when he was well, but who had been left in the hour of his agony to the tender mercies of a horny-handed chambermaid.

Conway James had rather overshot the mark, in stating that his brother would be very glad to see Claude Ogilvie. Mr. Selwyn James was never glad to see any one, but as Conway took him down without note of warning, Claude was received with conventional civility.

"He's been awfully ill; and he was being dunned out of his mind!" Conway said to his brother, when he was alone with him; "it will do him good to stay here for a time."

"It can only be for a short time," Mr. James replied; "in a fortnight I have other arrangements."

"And our presence will interfere with them, I suppose," Conway said, laughing. "Queer fellow you are, Selwyn—beg pardon for coming down on you in such a way. I'm apt to forget that we haven't one home any longer."

"I am always happy to see you—of course," Selwyn James said, quickly. He did not desire to seem inhospitable to his brother, but he was not by any means apt to forget that one home held them no longer. He held that when once brothers had winged their flight from the parental nest, that they should be as other men—*i. e.* remarkably punctilious with one another.

The bright, keen country air told favourably on the exhausted frame of the invalid. He began to recover his good looks and good spirits before he had been at Royston Hall a week. The master of the house was not an ill-natured—he was simply a disagreeable man when he

was put out. And nothing had occurred to put him out lately—therefore he gave a tacit permission for the things most conducive to the restoration of an invalid to be put at his sick guest's disposal.

He was greatly pleased at the cessation of all intercourse between his wife and her cousin Dora. He attributed it entirely to his influence over Alice, and to the successful implanting in her mind of the beauty and holiness of obeying him in all things.

"Have I ever spoken to you about that woman at The Oaks?" he said to Conway one evening, when they were smoking their cigars together in the study, while Alice was playing mild little pieces of music to Claude in the drawing-room.

"Ever? Yes, often," Conway replied, "Mrs. Burroughes you mean. Pretty woman, isn't she—and a cousin of your wife's, by-the-by?"

"Yes, she's that," Mr. Selwyn James said; "not at all the kind of woman I wanted Alice to see much of. I've made my wife drop her. I detest a fast woman." And then they threw away the ends of their cigars, and went into the room where the Baby was recovering to slow music.

It has been said, that Conway James did not believe half the assertions that Mr. Claude Ogilvie had been wont to make about himself. He did not give the Baby credit for one jot or tittle of the destructive properties that young gentleman charged himself with possessing. In fact, he regarded him as a boastful but harmless young Apollo, or he would never have introduced him into his brother's house.

Alice was in admirable order in these days. The motive power which drew her into Cambridge so often for the good of her young friend Ida had been discovered by her husband, and he had been very angry—very righteously angry and indignant indeed. But curiously enough, his anger and indignation were levelled more against the girl who had been led by the matron than against the matron who had led the girl. She made him believe that Ida Lisle had appealed to her affection against her judg-

ment. And he accredited the junior member of the Lisles of The Court with all manner of evil intentions, and condoned his wife's deception, the full extent of which he knew not.

Had she been possessed of more innate pride and courage, things might have been different with pretty Alice James. But she was a coward by nature, and he had cowed her very much in their early married days. A burst of rebellion might have put things on a better footing—might have shown him that she was not a soulless toy in his hands, but a responsible being. And had he once been made thoroughly to understand this, his bearing to her might have been more congenial, and she would have been saved from thinking it a light thing that she should deceive her husband in aught.

“But of all sad words by tongue or pen,
The saddest are these—‘It might have been.’”

It was not so. She was afraid of him—she had no just appreciation of what was right and wrong when he was concerned, for he had been harsh to her unjustly at times. Hers was not a nature to dare, but to deceive. The rigidly-brought up daughter of the pious west country clergyman told her husband more falsehoods in a week than would have sullied the lips of her unrestrained cousin Dora had the latter lived for a thousand years. Before Claude Ogilvie had been ten days in her house, this slave-wife, with the innocent face, and the manner that was so delightfully free from coquetry, dash and determination, had taken to the praiseworthy and womanly course of abusing her husband to him. She had heard the tale of Sir Victor Cleeve's marriage, from her brother-in-law, and she opened the subject of her wrongs by telling Claude how Sir Victor had wanted to marry her, and how the failure of his scheme had made him desperate! The two brothers had gone off for a ride round the farm when she opened her communication, and Claude said that he would go and walk on the terrace in the sun. He was honestly disposed at this juncture, and he had no wish to repay Selwyn James's hospitality by flirting with

Selwyn James's weak young wife. But man proposes and woman disposes. Mrs. Selwyn James would get her shawl and come too. She had about as much stability, faith, and strength of mind as a spaniel; and being deprived by her husband of all legitimate conversational outlets, she made the most of the golden opportunity out on the terrace in the sun.

It afforded Mrs. Selwyn James almost as much pleasure to abuse her cousin, who had declined her society for the nonce, as it did to abuse her husband, who had been the cause of that declination.

"I might as well have no relations near," she said. "Ida's not much of a companion for me—she's such a child, you know; and as for Dora, Mr. James wouldn't let me visit her, I assure you; it's terrible how Dora goes on."

"I dare say; I mean I don't know about your cousin, of course; but I've no doubt Mr. James is right."

"Mr. James—ah! No one knows what I've put up with from Mr. James." And then she turned her humid eyes upon him, and Claude Ogilvie pitied her profoundly, but thought at the same time she would be more discreet to keep her communications to herself.

He pitied her, but was not intensely interested. She was not a woman to startle any man into a sudden passion, even when there had been nothing dishonourable in being so startled. And lax as Claude Ogilvie's notions were on many points, he was not quite so bad as to propose to himself, in cold blood, to make love to his neighbour's wife. But still he pitied her, and she fanned the flame of his pity ever so gently, and made him nice arrowroot (a species of food he loathed), and talked to him about her old home and her first love, and the mistake her marriage had been. And he, for awhile, listened, and made no reply, but told Conway James he must go back to town directly. And when the day of his departure was fixed, he rewarded the resolution he had displayed in tearing himself away from the Circe with the simple ways, by giving her eloquent glances of sympathy from his long, deep-blue eyes—eyes that were

like Victor Cleeve's in shape and colour, but lacking the clear boldness of expression which marked the young baronet's.

He assailed his conscience afterwards by telling himself that he had made no appeal to her heart or imagination (gallantly giving her credit for two things she did not possess), while he had been a guest in her husband's house. And she sat in the seat of the scornful about Lady Cleeve to her husband, and about Dora in her effusions to her mother, and assailed her conscience by declaring that she had made no assignation with Claude Ogilvie. What he called his glances, and what she called the information she gave him relative to her intended visit to Baysford without her husband in August is not known. Some people might have fallen into the pardonable error of deeming the first reprehensible and the second an assignation. At any rate, after the mention of it, it was fully understood between them that when she went to Baysford in August, Claude Ogilvie should test the hospitality of The Chase.

After the cessation of those drives into Cambridge, which had infused an element of excitement into Miss Ida's life, Mrs. Selwyn James saw very little of her youngest cousin. The young lady did not care for Royston Hall pure and simple; Royston Hall as a means towards a more *piquant* end was all very well.

With the delightful frankness of extreme youth and volubility, Ida gave forth some true sentiments and statements respecting Alice as soon as ever Alice ceased to be useful to her. She did not tell her mamma about Mr. Wynne, that might have compromised her liberty in the future—but she weakened Lady Lisle's faith in Alice's "great good sense" considerably.

"She's so silly; she thinks if a man's civil that he's in love with her at once," Ida said; and Lady Lisle replied, "Very weak indeed, my dear; but how do you know that she thinks men in love with her?"

("Catch a weasel asleep," was the mental reflection of the unsophisticated schoolgirl; "Ma's 'cute, but so am I.") "Oh, from what she has told me about Sir Victor

Cleeve, mamma," she said aloud; "she was always talking nonsense about him, or some man or other; she doesn't care a bit for her husband, you know."

Altogether Lady Lisle's faith in Alice's superiority to Dora was considerably weakened. "Dora was never a fool," the mother thought; "flighty for a Lisle, but never a fool like Alice."

Lady Lisle confided her newly-formed views respecting Alice to her married daughter when she saw Mrs. Burroughes the next time. "Even that child found out that she has no affection for her husband, Dora," she said. "I should be sorry to think ill of her; but really—"

"Well, *don't* think ill of her, mamma," Mrs. Burroughes interrupted. "Most likely there's no occasion to do so. I've had so many heads shaken about myself unnecessarily, that I never put on the pendulum action about another woman."

"Ah, you think more lightly of these things than I do, I am sorry to say," Lady Lisle said, rather frostily.

"I don't know about thinking more lightly; if I did anything wrong I wouldn't excuse myself, but I don't see that I am called upon to accuse others."

"We ought never to set stumbling-blocks in our weak brother's path"—(Lady Lisle delighted in twisting scripture texts up into cat-o'-nine tails for any erring back that offered itself.) "You're the occasion of others falling, though you may stand yourself; your manner is a snare."

"So a good many have found who denied that my face was," Dora replied, carelessly. She had long left off feeling indignant when her mother lectured her. Lady Lisle was a thoroughly good woman, and her daughter respected her, and only wished sometimes that so much real, substantial goodness were softened by a little of that broad, lofty charity which thinketh no evil, and leaves the doers of it to the judgment of the God who made them.

But her mother's fears and remarks set Dora thinking a good deal about Alice. "She's fallen into the school-

girl trick of talking nonsense through being with a schoolgirl like Ida," she thought. "I'll go over and hold out the olive branch to Selwyn James for the sake of that child, whose mind and heart would both be healthy enough if only they were properly treated."

She had no false pride, this reprobated "woman at The Oaks," to keep her from going to the side of any woman whom she thought she might assist in any way. She never thought harshly or spoke evil of her neighbours, or stood aloof thanking God that she was not as the publicans and sinners. Her hand was ever promptly extended to any man or woman whom its light grasp might save from destruction. She judged no one, she denounced none as being common and unclean. She never wrapped herself up in a cold mantle of religion and respectability; she never said her prayers with a longer face in public than she did in private. Every action of her life might have been laid bare before the world and she would have lost nothing by the operation, and perhaps no one in the world but her husband knew how thoroughly brave, honest, truthful, and pure at heart was this woman, who would "lark" over anything that came in her way, in the field of either life or hunting; she was no Sunday Christian, indeed she was terribly lax in every way, this liberal daughter of a Tory father. She did not feel that damnation would be the portion of all who did not declare aloud once in every week at least that they were miserable sinners: no wonder the neighbourhood of that University town thought her "far from what she should have been;" no wonder that many others, who were above suspicion like Alice James, should have denounced her "goings on" as "terrible."

CHAPTER XXX.

A WOUNDED LION.

THE Cleeves had agreed when they were about to start for the flower show in the morning, that they should be untrammelled on that day by all dinner arrangements ; "one never knows at what time one can free oneself from people and get away," Madge had said. "Don't you think Victor, we had better have tea and supper together, and order it for nine?"

Lady Cleeve herself would not have ventured upon the suggestion of such an infringement of the standing order of things as regarded that great institution, dinner ; she was terribly afraid of going wrong in these small things, and so, in her earnest endeavours to show them that she was thoroughly *au fait* of the manners and customs of high life, she merely succeeded in proving to them that she was so through the medium of penny number high life novels, the information contained in which is of course strictly reliable.

"Even if we are not at home, dinner should be served at seven as usual ; I've ordered it so special, and they've a right to obey me," she had replied, for she regarded Madge's speech as an attempted reassumption of authority. However, Victor had elected for Madge's plan being carried out, and had told his wife that though none questioned their proud privilege of obeying her, still on this occasion their prerogative should be extended, and they should be granted the "right" of obeying him also, by having a meal, they'd call it by no name, ready at nine o'clock.

But the hours were long between the hurried return of Sir Victor and Lady Cleeve and the time when the others might be expected to arrive, and so a dinner was improvised by Lady Cleeve's command, at which Charlie and Lucille alone sat down. Sir Victor had retired to his own room with a bad headache.

With all the force of her heart and soul, and with all

the strength of her mind, Charlie disapproved of Victor's marriage, and disliked the woman whom he had made his wife. She had no maudlin sentimentality about her —no false notions of duty and rectitude; she had told herself and her father when she had first heard of this thing that it was a duty to stop it if it might be stopped, and when it was an accomplished unalterable fact, she had declared it to be right for more reasons than one that they should not all dwell in the same tent. In both instances she had failed by reason of a counter influence being stonger than hers and prevailing against her. But though she was no maudlin sentimentalist to drift with the tide of feeling from one extreme to the other, she did rage against what she had termed the "gloating over" the slights that were offered to the woman in whose house she had been compelled to have her residence, and now that she had heard from Victor how her worst fears of what might happen at the flower show had been realized, she did shrink from meeting the woman who, if not totally devoid of feeling, must feel bitterly repentant now of the past which was lashing the present. With all the force of her heart and soul, and with all the strength of her mind she disliked Victor's wife, but Victor was so dear to her that she pitied the one who was made the instrument of his chastisement; she felt that to have brought discredit or sorrow upon Victor would have been the sorest woe in life for her.

But really, when Lady Cleeve made her appearance, though pity might be extended, Charlie felt that sympathy would be utterly out of place. Lucille had vanquished her chagrin in her dressing-room. She had reflected that if the smiles and the hands of these people to whose order her husband belonged were withheld from her, she would have a fair excuse for seeking other and more congenial society. "They wouldn't suit me very likely," she thought; and this much credit must be accorded to her acumen, that very likely they would not have suited her. She remembered, too, that she had some very tangible blessings left to her, though this supreme one was denied.

She had a handsome house and beautiful clothes, and carriages to drive about in, and horses to ride (though she had never essayed to do the latter), and all these things were very solidly satisfactory to the woman whose life for thirty years and more had been void of them. And she was Lady Cleeve, and she could afford to indulge in Piesse and Lubin's rarest cosmetics! Oh! there was balm in Gilead still, though she had been cut by the county.

Up in the solitude of her own room, while she had been doing up her face under a very strong artificial light, she had come to the conclusion that she "would brave it out," before his cousins at any rate. "They'll be mistaken if they think to catch me caring for it," she had said. And now she came down to dinner with this resolution of braving it out stamped in coarse characters upon her face.

"I suppose you've heard about the show from Victor," she said, as she took her place at the table. And Charlie remembered the presence of the servants, and replied with a composure that was the offspring of her intense desire to spare Victor's credit—

"Yes, a little. I don't wonder at your getting tired and coming away. I can't think how my sister can care to stay so long."

"Oh! she's hand-in-glove with a lot of high-nosed aristocrats who don't take the trouble to look her up at home," Lady Cleeve said, looking up defiantly. And Charlie tortured her brains to think of something to say that would not call forth a coarse retort before the servants.

"I haven't told you, have I, that my mamma is coming down to pay me a visit soon?" Lady Cleeve said presently. And then it occurred to her that she would be grand, and let those present perceive that the family of Michel had fastidious requirements. So she added—

"She's rather particular about an aspect. I shall want that south sitting-room for her, for she's not coming here to be put upon."

"Of course you'll give her what rooms you like," Charlie replied coldly. Now that south sitting-room had

always been considered to belong especially to herself and Madge.

"Victor seems to be sulky," Lady Cleeve said abruptly, when they were alone at last; "he had no headache when we were coming home—it's come on very quickly."

"He looked as if he had a headache when I saw him, I am sure," Charlie answered.

"He seems to have a delicate constitution," Lucille said, and her eyes began to sparkle with malice—she was excited to the point of regarding both the manner and matter of the words she was about to utter less carefully than usual. "He seems to have a delicate constitution—he got a chill to-day, and it spoilt his appetite. I wonder you don't take him a glass of wine and a biscuit."

"So I will," Charlie replied coolly. "I wonder I didn't think of it before, indeed." It created a desire to do it in the mind of the younger Miss Cleeve immediately, this sarcastic tone that his wife elected to take relative to her interest in Victor.

It roused her to antagonism and carried her with the wine and biscuit to his study door. And there its superficial strength failed her, and she felt sorry that she had come to beard this young wounded lion—whom she might not soothe with love—in his den.

He was sitting by the table when she went in, with a pen in his hand, and the rough draughts of a good many notes before him. "Look here, Charlie," he said, when she came up to his side, "I'm going to write to some of the fellows I knew at Aldershot—to James or Claude Ogilvie—and ask them to tell me of some man who can coach me up quickly for an army examination."

She drew a quick little breath that was almost a sigh—only she would not suffer it to degenerate into one. He was not her property—another woman had the legal right to sigh and wail over the blight that had fallen upon him and his consequent bitterness of spirit! She herself might only indulge in that peculiarly pleasant kind of affection known as "sisterly love" for a man who is not a brother.

"Oh! an army examination," she said. And then she put the glass of wine down on the table, and steadied her hand on the edge of the same. And he fell to drawing faces on the rough copies of letters the phraseology of which he could not determine, and altogether there was rather an awkward pause. He had been rather effusive towards her in the first gush of his grief on his return home that afternoon, and they both remembered this little passage in their lives now.

"It's a hideous thing to go through," he said presently.

"You'll find it easy enough, Victor. I believe you could 'pass' anything if you tried."

"Oh, I didn't mean the examination—awful fools have got through that before now, so I suppose I could too; it's not the examination I meant, it's this—but there, it's no use talking about it," he continued, jumping up suddenly.

He looked miserably pale and harassed as he spoke, and he commenced that restless pacing up and down the room which betrays that manhood with its cares and sorrows has come upon the pedestrian. Boys never play at wild beasts in this way.

"No; it's no use talking about it," she said, sadly.

"And it's no use blaming *her* now," he went on, grinding the words out between his teeth, savagely; "but she's——"

"Don't you blame her, Victor," Charlie interrupted quickly. "I dare not say much; but The Chase and its environs are not the world; go into the army; it will be wise." And then she turned and got away out of the room as quickly as she could, for she could not counsel Victor's departure even now without an emotion that it behoved her not to allow him to perceive.

"What a blind fool I was," he muttered, when he turned and found her gone, "to leave *her* for that——;" then he checked himself. No epithet bestowed upon his unworthy wife would give him back the bright past in which he had been free to act.

Drummond Cleeve had had a difficult part to play

that day before the assembled multitude in Exeter. He could hardly go hand in hand with those who bestowed sweeping and unmitigated censure upon Lady Cleeve, for had he not suffered his daughters to remain under the same roof with her? Neither would it answer his purpose to affect disbelief in a cause for the cut, or doubt as to that cut being well merited. When Lady Uxborough and others told him that they had "trembled—actually tr-r-r-embled at the audacity which had been displayed that day by the promoted stroller," Drummond Cleeve shrugged his shoulders, spoke of his desire to consult while he could the welfare of his ward, which desire had actuated him to remain at The Chase, and finally wound up by the expression of his determination to sift the matter thoroughly, and if possible effect a separation—a divorce!

"You must protest at once—you must insist either on her withdrawal from The Chase, or you must remove your own family—or you don't know what the consequences may be to your own daughters," one lady with a brace of sons who had looked too kindly to please the maternal heart upon the portionless Miss Cleeves, observed to him when she was bidding him adieu. And Drummond Cleeve sent her "good manners wouldn't let him say where" in his heart, and thanked her for the expression of her sentiments in tones that taught her they were a matter of profound indifference to him.

But still he saw that he was expected to make a move now, and he resolved upon making it grandly as soon as he reached home that night. He saw his way, if things were properly managed, to a permanent instalment in a very good home. Not such a home as The Chase would have been, but still such an one as would not derogate from his dignity. The "Gate House," in fact—an old house that was unoccupied now, and that had been used for generations whenever there was a widow, as the jointure house of the Cleeves. Here he could settle with credit, and still supervise The Chase.

The father and daughter had talked earnestly at first, on leaving Exeter, as to what it would be best to say and

do. But when they were nearing The Chase, a silence fell over them—they had much that was painful to go through before a definite understanding could be arrived at with Sir Victor Cleeve.

As they grew silent, Mrs. Cleeve grew loquacious. "Murder will out," she said; "depend upon it, some day or other we shall hear all about her. Mrs. Lisle said the other day, 'the finger of the Lord will point it out before long, and then——'"

"Mrs. Lisle's a fool," Mr. Cleeve said, with the irritability that always made his wife shake. "It's invariably the way—I am always harassed and disconcerted by hearing what people have said, after a thing has happened. I do beg, Mrs. Cleeve, that you'll refrain from repeating to me all the foolish remarks you may hear and utter relative to affairs that don't concern you."

All through Drummond Cleeve's career it had been remarked by his acquaintances, that his chivalrous deference to women was one of his greatest charms.

The young master of the house was in his own room still, when Mr. Cleeve reached The Chase and inquired for him. "Go and give my compliments to your master, and ask him if he can see me for a few minutes—I'll come to him there," he added. He was a gentleman—it came to him to pay this slight grace to Sir Victor: to go to him like a man, instead of sending for him like a boy.

Irrespective of all their plots and plans concerning him, they had come to like him very much. Drummond Cleeve had declared to himself, when looking at Victor the first night of their meeting, that the "mother had come across and marred the breed." But as he came to know the young fellow, he had been fain to confess that there had been no marring in the matter, and that the sturdy, honest qualities which had been transmitted through the mother had not impaired the type at all. He had come to do full justice to Victor individually, and to like him well; and now as he walked to the interview, his heart ached—worldly, selfish man that he was—for the pain he was going to inflict.

Perhaps there are few things more unpleasant in life

than receiving a message to the effect that some one wants to have an interview with you. They are sure, when they treat you to this preliminary formality, to intend asking for your advice, or offering you theirs. In the one case you are oppressed with a sense of tedium, and in the other with a sense of remorse; and in either with a sense of profound detestation for the volunteered presence. It is doubtful whether much good, or at any rate peace of mind, would not accrue to the world if *avant couriers* were invariably slain.

The paragraph that has just been penned is not intended as a precursor to the murder of the footman who conveyed Mr. Cleeve's wishes to Sir Victor. It was simply the result of much serious reflection on the point of the apparent impossibility of avoiding pre-arranged interviews in novels. They appear to be necessary evils—they are one of the few things that are common to real life and fiction. It takes an immense amount of courage to fire the first shot in verbal warfare: it is only in literal carnage that we recognise the pure unadulterated chivalry of good breeding which prompted the words on a memorable occasion, "Gentlemen of the French Guard; fire first!" When hard things have to be said between two men who do not dislike one another, he shows a very true courage who removes the onus of breaking the silence from his opponent's shoulders.

Sir Victor Cleeve rose slowly from a chair by the open window, as his guardian came into the room. It was a chilly May evening, and a fire burnt in the grate, but the young baronet found the night air sweet to his fevered brow.

"I know what you've come to speak about, sir," he said, as Drummond Cleeve came rather nervously into the room. And the tones—steady and deep—of his voice dispelled a portion of his guardian's hesitation.

"Yes," he said; "you know now what you have done?"

And then he was rather startled, for all boyishness was gone from the face and bearing of the man who answered—

"My God! don't I know it—don't I know it!" and had he spoken out all that was in his heart, he would

have added, "and don't I curse the deed—and the way the knowledge of what it is has been given to me!"

"It can't be undone, I suppose?" Drummond Cleeve interrogated; "it's perfectly useless now to say more about the folly of it—that is a thing that can't be recalled; but I have your future welfare at heart, and if you can give me your attention I should like to come to a full and fair understanding with you. In the first place, while that—Lady Cleeve—remains here, it is impossible, after what has transpired to-day, that we can do so."

"What?" Victor almost shouted.

"I say that I must remove my daughter."

"I can't stand it!—My God, I can't stand it! I love them better than my life, and you'll take them away from me! She's the only one that has given me a word or a look that isn't a stab since this cursed affair—I can't lose her!"

"Are you alluding to your wife?" Mr. Cleeve asked with dignity; "if so, don't rhapsodize, pray, no one wishes—"

"My *wife*!" the young man exclaimed. "No, it's Charlie I'm speaking of. My wife!" and as he repeated the word he went back hastily more into the shade. The lion was wounded very sorely!

"While that—Lady Cleeve—remains here my daughter cannot stay in this house, Victor," Mr. Cleeve repeated emphatically. "I am sorry for you, but there can be no appeal against the decision which I have been compelled to make. You would not see your cousins treated as—with contumely, by their own class would you?"

"Would I? you ask, as if I were a rascal as well as a fool."

"You are neither, and no one knows it better than myself," Drummond Cleeve went on warmly; "my interest, my affection for you, Victor, is unabated. Had you been my own son, I could not have felt more with you and for you than I did to-day. To prove to you that these are no mere idle words, I propose, instead of removing my daughters to town, to settle with them at Baysford. We have no desire to lose your society. No.

no, my children would not hear of such a rifting asunder of all ties." Mr. Cleeve had quite affected himself, and as for the wounded lion, he went farther into the shade than before.

"At Baysford! There's no place you can—" he began, but his guardian interrupted him with—

"To settle purely personal matters at once, my dear boy, and to show you how thoroughly friendly-disposed I am towards you, I'll ask your permission to take up my abode with my family at the Gate-house. Will you let me have it?"

"It's an awful place for her to go to, and she's so fond of that south room," he said. There was no doubt about his willingness to give them the Gate-house, or aught else that belonged to him. His only doubt was as to its being good enough.

"Thank you, thank you—then that's settled. I am glad you appreciate my motive," Drummond Cleeve rejoined heartily. "And now I must speak about a more unpleasant matter! Are you prepared to investigate——"

"To investigate what?"

"The antecedents of—Lady Cleeve."

"For what purpose?" Sir Victor asked, rising as he spoke, and coming forward again to the table by which his guardian had seated himself. "For what purpose, sir?" he repeated, as Drummond Cleeve played an imaginary air on an imaginary piano.

"For the purpose of bringing to light something which might entitle you to a divorce."

"No!" shouted the young baronet; "and let any one 'ware of doing it for me. I'll bear the consequences of my cursed folly as best I can."

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE GATE-HOUSE FAIRIES.

LADY CLEEVE was lying on one of the couches, with a book in her hand, when Drummond Cleeve went back from the interview with his ward to the room where he had left his two daughters alone. She looked up steadily into the face of her husband's guardian as he entered, but he kept his eyes averted from her, and no word passed between them. There was very much the air of lying in wait in this watchful silence of hers, which she had not broken since she had suggested to Charlie that Victor should have wine and biscuit.

In fact, she was keenly anxious now—too anxious to utter idle words. She did not know how far a guardian's power over his ward might extend. She did not know whether the tenure of her own residence at The Chase might not have been put upon an extremely uncertain footing during this interview. In her heart she knew well that she had not a friend in that house—or in the world, indeed—and if it came to a struggle she felt that there might be dire difficulty in holding her own. She felt all her danger as she remained there, silent, couchant, ready for a spring.

It is difficult to be unconstrained and debonair when one is being racked with anxiety. Lady Cleeve, had she followed the dictates of desire would have thrown pride and appearances to the winds now, and have cried aloud to Drummond Cleeve, "For God's sake, tell me what is to become of me." But the reflection that she might lose by this move enabled her to exercise restraint, and kept her couchant.

The book that she held in her hand trembled till its leaves fluttered as she saw Mr. Cleeve bend down and say something to his eldest daughter. There was the look of a supplicating wild animal in her eyes as she eagerly bent them upon the man who might be telling that she was to be hurled down back into the old life of penury, obloquy, labour, vice, and care.

Presently Mrs. Cleeve came into the room with the child in her arms, as a sort of protection against the missiles that might be flying, and the two girls welcomed the advent of their small brother warmly, for he was something that could be spoken to without leading direct to the cause of confusion.

"He looks like a Murillo to-night," Charlie said, taking him in her arms; "he always seems to have more life in him at night, doesn't he?" she continued, going up to the side of the couch Lady Cleeve was on, and holding the child down to her. Charlie could no longer endure the system of mutely ignoring the presence of a fellow-creature, however good the reason for doing so might be.

It has been said before that badness affords no immunity from suffering. It may be heterodox to suggest it, but surely all are punished sufficiently in this world for the evil they do in it. Conscience is the real hell; and when it is as universally believed as preached, that God is a God of mercy, we shall cease to endeavour to stultify children's minds by telling them that they will get it on all sides—here and hereafter too!

There had been great pain for the woman who was criminal and coarse, deceitful and designing, in the events of the past day. She was not gifted with the fine susceptibilities of good birth and breeding, but she had human feelings, and these had been torn and trampled upon, most justly very likely, but the justice of a punishment never takes the sting of pain out. She had "braved it out" after not too refined a fashion, but for all that she had felt a certain amount of pain. And Charlie recognised her sufferings, and the claim humanity has on humanity to alleviation if possible, though one be a Gentile and the other a Jew. So she had held her little baby-brother down to the woman whom she neither liked nor sympathized with, acting on a certain principle that if it became general would break down the bulwarks of society.

Lucille put the book that had trembled till its leaves had audibly fluttered down by her side, as Charlie called

her attention to the only being that had not judged and condemned her in that house, and something—some feeling that may not be analysed,—softened her tones strangely as she held out her arms to take the little child, and said—

“Yes, he’s a pretty little dear; let me take him.”

He hadn’t been a Christian long, which must be his excuse for not deeming himself defiled by the way in which she clasped him to her bosom, but his mamma had for a vast number of years, so naturally she could not bear the woman whose career the finger of the Lord might point out in time to contaminate her infant; therefore Mrs. Cleeve rang the bell abruptly, and ordered “Master Baby to bed at once,” in freezing tones.

It was a little thing, this abrupt withdrawal from her arms of an immature pulpy mass which had no claims of blood upon her, but it came upon the summit of many other things, and acted like the last straw on the over-weighted camel! Lady Cleeve could not balance the good and evil of the move any longer—she could not “brave it out” any more. There was no flash, no defiance, only a certain wild sort of appeal in her manner as she crossed the room hurriedly, saying—

“I’ll go and ask my husband why it is I am treated as a worse woman than when I came here a month ago?” and her sentence ended with a sob they almost thought.

“How could you do it?” Charlie asked, turning almost fiercely to her step-mother; “hasn’t there been enough already—couldn’t you let her forget for a moment?”

“I think your mother was quite right,” Mr. Cleeve said, stretching himself upon a sofa languidly; “I shouldn’t have done it myself, but that’s not to the purpose; it’s a woman’s place to draw these little delicate nice distinctions.”

“No, I don’t think you would, papa; I don’t think you would. I’d be ashamed if I thought you would strike any one who’s down.”

“While you are in such an excited frame of mind I don’t care to talk to you on the subject.” Mr. Cleeve said coldly.

"Now tell us what Victor said when you went to him, papa; did he agree?" Madge asked.

"Not to all I proposed," Mr. Cleeve rejoined: "he agrees to the Gate-house, but he refuses to stir up muddy water. Perhaps he is right; if he failed in getting a divorce it would be more unpleasant."

"He is right," Charlie said emphatically; "as she said, there's no more reason than there was a month ago. What is it about the Gate-house?"

"I thought it might have occurred even to you that we couldn't stay here in the house with her after what has happened to-day," Madge said quickly. "Papa means, very rightly too, to take us away."

"Your approbation of his acts is a great solace to papa, I've no doubt," Charlie answered recklessly. "You may remember that it did occur to me long ago that we ought to go from here: you didn't see it then, any of you, and I don't see it now, as we've stayed at all."

"I am sorry that your mental and moral vision is so defective, dear, that's all," Madge said coolly, and Mr. Cleeve got up and conveyed himself gracefully and skilfully out of the room and the argument, with the remark that "he was tired and should go to bed," which meant that he should remove himself from the present uncongenial atmosphere of fact, into the sympathetic one of Balzac by his dressing-room fire.

"They're both clearer than your own, Madge," Charlie retorted; "and they show me that what was good a month ago can't be bad now because strangers have scowled."

"Strangers have done nothing of the sort; and if you urged the going from conviction a month ago, you ought to be very glad that we have come round to your point of view; it's never too late to mend, and I own that our staying here at all was ill advised."

"And our going now is downright mean and cowardly, and of a piece with the conduct that has been pursued towards him all along. I'm not pretending to care for her, it would be a pretence—I don't care for her excepting as I would for any thing that is hard hunted; but I

do care for him, and I hate the idea of cutting him worse than he is cut already. If you had seen him when he came home to-day as I did, you would have been sorry for him. He broke down not a bit like a boy, but like a man who'd rather have died than have done it. Oh! and it's not a year since we stood in that doorway, you and I, and said what a boy he was."

There was evidently no pretence in her display of concern and affection for Victor. Her sister did not doubt her for a moment.

"Have I been the cause of the sorrow that has aged him, Charlie," Madge said. "Whether the plans I made for him were bad or good is nothing to the purpose now—they've not been carried out; whatever the suffering, it has not come through me."

"Well, no, very likely not; but just for once, Madge, don't reason, but feel, and feel for him. Never mind what's brought it about; comfort him now it has come about. Look at her! hear her—think of what she is, and then ask yourself if she can make up to him for the loss of sisterly love and sympathy you offered him that first night he came home?"

"I have looked at her—she's very beautiful—a trifle old for Victor; but as he preferred her love to—ours, I can do nothing."

"I don't like running off like a rat from a falling house," Charlie said, going over and casting her arm round her sister's shoulder as she sat down by her side. "Don't let us quarrel, Madge—forgive me for speaking warmly, and don't quarrel."

"I am not inclined to do so; it's you who always put yourself in opposition."

"That's only because I cannot bear to see you so ready to aid in making him smart."

"The more the wound smarts the sooner he will take steps to heal it," Madge said, putting Charlie's hand off her shoulder.

"It's a wound that can't be healed."

"Oh yes, it can, with Sir Cresswell Cresswell's assistance."

"The cure seems to be worse than the disease," Charlie replied, and then the consciousness that perhaps she herself was not wholly unwilling that this thing should finally come about urged her on to be outwardly generous at least. "And how dare you judge her?" she said; "what right have we to be so horribly uncharitable and to wish such evil—not that I care for her or like her," she continued, frankly, "only——"

"Only you find it rather hard in your present state of agitation to separate the husband from the wife," Madge interrupted. And Charlie felt that there was just enough truth in the reflection cast upon her to render it advisable for her to practise the golden quality of silence.

Lucille's fears were considerably assuaged after seeing and speaking to her husband. The tide of luck might turn eventually; but at present she deemed that she held the winning cards. It gave her no annoyance whatever that Drummond Cleeve should withdraw his family from her companionship. "I am very glad they are going," she said, heartily; "they've made it unpleasant enough to me to-night, I can tell you. I wish they were going farther than Baysford."

That they were not going farther than Baysford—that they would do him the grace to reside in the Gate-house—was the sole solace Sir Victor Cleeve could extract from the whole situation. After that one interview between his guardian and himself there was nothing more said about his folly and its fatal effects. Lady Cleeve saved herself and them much unpleasantness by remaining secluded in her own apartments—and they appreciated the delicacy which kept her there, and rewarded it by hastening the preparations for their departure. Victor himself forgot his troubles at times and was cordially interested, and then remembered them with a start and a groaning lament breathed into Charlie's ear that "all this only hastened their going."

The Gate-house was a long two-storied building of no particular style of architecture unless it was the cow-shed. It stood at the end of The Chase grounds, and had been erected on the ruins of what had been the

grand entrance once—whence its name, the Gate-house. The village street was only divided from it by a grass-plot and some rails and chains, and the front door opened right into the largest sitting-room, through which you passed into two smaller ones on the left hand, and a kitchen and room that might be anything on the right. The three sitting-rooms were as deep as the house, but behind the kitchen and apartment that might be anything, a pantry, and a dairy, and a scullery, and a larder had been built out after the manner of good old-fashioned country houses of no very great pretensions. In fact, though it was a thoroughly comfortable house, there was, it will be seen, a great decline and fall in coming from The Chase.

There was a great quantity of heavy furniture in it already. Four-post bedsteads, substantial tables, horse-hair sofas, and things of that sort. And now that it was decided that they were to go, Charlie made the best of it (though she still wished they had gone at first) and declared that with the help of a little French polish and chintz the place might soon be made to “look charming!”

Sir Victor would have had them take away the best that was in The Chase for the adornment of their new home, or have had them let him furnish it entirely afresh. But to neither of these proposals would they agree. The two girls had the heavy pieces of furniture that were already there marshalled in review before them, and they pronounced them “admirably in keeping with the character of the house, and not to be improved upon.” They went down every morning immediately after breakfast, and stayed at the Gate-house all day—these three cousins—working harder than any of their servants, and forgetting in the ardour of work their cares and plans and disappointments. With the aid of painted canvas, Indian matting, foxes’ heads, stags’ horns, stands of flowers, large pots of evergreens, and two or three mahogany settees, they converted the spacious room into which the front door opened into an entrance-hall or lobby. There was another door opposite to the street one, leading out into the garden behind; and out of this they had the panels of wood cut, and glass, which they had rendered gorgeous

and glowing with decalcomanie, put in its place. They summoned the village painter, and made him colour the walls of the two smaller rooms, which by nature were dark and pale grey, which pearly hue Charlie then declared to be "too cold," and forthwith Victor and herself proceeded to enliven it by getting a most wonderful bordering of crimson and gold for the room they were going to make a dining-room, and roses and green leaves for the other. Mr. Drummond Cleeve going down in a lordly manner to see how "matters were progressing," was more surprised than pleased to find his eldest daughter engaged in neatly nailing on some feather cushions to the framework of an arid old couch, preparatory to covering it with some flowery chintz, and Miss Charlie on the top of some steps smoothing down a bit of the bordering that Sir Victor Cleeve had just handed up to her properly prepared with paste. And this before the eyes of the innumerable village helps who always congregate to hinder one on such occasions.

The house was habitable, though all details of arrangement were not completed, in a few days after they commenced operations. They turned everything to account on which they laid their hands, as skilful tasteful women can. Angular hard-featured old pieces of furniture lost some of their angularity and harshness after passing a brief period under those small active hands of theirs. They replaced them gracefully, and you wondered—at least Victor did—how it was that formerly these things had looked hideous. They were in their element during this period of contriving; women delight in making the best of things in this way, and putting everything they touch in the most becoming light. There is more credit to her who evidences artistic taste and a reverence for the beautiful in the disposal of things which individually do not possess the latter quality, than to her who arranges exquisite objects exquisitely. If Charlie and Madge had been reduced to rushes on their floors and oaken stools, they would have placed them prettily, and in such a way as would have attested that the spirit of a gentlewoman had presided over the disposition of those

things. They covered rickety old deal dressing-tables that they found upstairs, with bright pink and blue cambric, the vividness of whose hue they then toned down with clouds of clear muslin, frilled at the top. They draped old looking-glasses in more muslin at their battered old backs, and tied the fluted drapery down with pink and blue ribbon. And though these latter arrangements were denounced by their papa as "disgusting vulgarities," they made the upper chambers of the naturally sombre old Gate-house very bright and cheerful. The only extravagance in which they permitted themselves to indulge was in having new carpets for the two sitting-rooms. The dingy old ones they had beaten and darned and purified thoroughly in the sweet May air, and then they—the two white-handed Misses Cleeve—reorganized them for the bedrooms. Mrs. Lisle coming in to see how they were getting on, was fain to confess to herself that—"My Alice would never have done half as much." When they had put the upper regions straight, they went down into the kitchen and aggrieved their servant by polishing up the dish covers, that had been suffered to become like lead, to their original brightness; and then further aggrieved her by declaring that divers pains and penalties should be inflicted upon her if she did not keep them henceforth bright as they had made them now.

And all this time—though he was with them daily, and indeed hourly—there was no mention made by Victor or to Victor of his wife. This is not stated as either a reprehensible or commendable fact, but simply as a fact, and an additional proof of the facility youth displays for forgetting. But when they were going down to the Gate-house, not to return, Charlie drew Victor on one side, and said—

"Victor, will you come up with me while I say good-bye to Lady Cleeve?" And when he said "Yes," with a flushed, agitated face, she added, "And I shall say good-bye to you up there at the same time."

Lucille had expected them to go off without making a sign. She had been prepared for it, and on the whole

not ill pleased at it. But still, in some inner recess of her heart she did feel moved by this display of courtesy on Charlie's part. It might be hollow—no matter—it was a recognition of her existence as the wife of Sir Victor Cleeve and the mistress of The Chase, and she felt grateful for it.

It was but a brief civility—it could not be other than brief, for Charlie had purposely deferred paying it until the carriage that was to take them down was at the door.

"I have come to say good-bye," she said, walking straight up to Lucille and holding out her hand. "Good-bye, Lady Cleeve!"

"Good-bye," Lucille said, looking into Charlie's eyes almost sadly. "You wouldn't believe me if I said I was sorry you were going. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, Victor," Charlie said, hurriedly withdrawing her hand from the wife and offering it to the husband. And then before he had time to speak, even if he could have thought of anything to say that might express to her a tithe of the pain he felt, Charlie had gone out from his presence away to another home, and the same roof would shelter them no more.

He was very miserable, and he was not clever at disguising this misery as he sat there thinking over all that Charlie had been, and all that she might have been to him. When they heard the sound of the carriage wheels on the gravel, Lady Cleeve got up and watched it drive away over the bridge. She kept her face turned to the window for a long time, for he had never uttered one word of reproach for the evil she had brought upon him. And the sight of his mute misery was a reproach now, and wounded and angered her.

"Will you take me for a drive, Victor," she said after a time; "I've kept in the house for days, and I'm tired of it, and don't know where to walk if I go out alone."

"Yes, if you like," he said; and then she went away to her dressing-room to prepare for the drive, and he to order the horses.

There were two postal deliveries in the day at Baysford, and as Lucille passed along the corridor to her own

room, she met her maid bringing her a letter. It was from her mother, and it gave her the information that she, the writer, had lately seen Claude Ogilvie looking like his own ghost, and further, that she was coming to The Chase as soon as her daughter sent her a "remittance." "More about Claude when I see you," the prudent Mrs. Mitchell wrote. "What I have to say about him mustn't be on paper." The acute lady knew that her daughter might require this incentive of hearing something about Claude to induce her to speed her mamma's visit by sending the remittance. "Can he be sorry for my marrying another man *after all?*" she thought, as she went on with her preparations for the drive with her husband. "Oh! if I could only see him again; if he'd only come here as he said he would." She had never heard of his illness, and the embers of her old passion for him took fire, and blazed up again at the thought that Claude Ogilvie had been pining himself into the semblance of a ghost on her account.

"I wish I could see him again—I wish he'd come here," she repeated, as she stood before the glass arranging her veil over the still beautiful face on which years and trials had told fearfully, one saw, when the powder and paint were off. "Oh! Claude," she sighed, "if I hadn't been *too old* for you to go on loving I should have been happier than with all I have now."

CHAPTER XXXII.

A TIME OF PEACE.

THE female members of the various families round came down upon them to call before they were settled. It was almost ostentatious, this marked civility, it was paid so promptly. Apparently they delighted in pointing the difference between the attention paid to the Gate-house and the inattention displayed towards The Chase, or rather the mistress thereof. Lady Cleeve rarely passed through the village, in the solitary splendour of her well-horsed

carriage, without seeing a phaeton, or a dog-cart, or a pony-chaise outside the pales and chains that separated the Gate-house grass-plot from the street. She always told herself that she didn't care, and that these people wouldn't have suited her. But she did care, though the latter part of her statement was true enough. And whenever she could, without making the avoidance marked to her servants, she took her solitary drive out in an opposite direction.

As the summer came on, and they settled down more thoroughly in their new quarters, their house gained for itself—or rather they gained for their house—a very pleasant name. The sports and pastimes, and the social observances of the best people, differ very slightly in divers counties. And so every one who may chance to spend a great portion of the year in any part of the country will understand how surely one house in the neighbourhood asserts its popularity, and quietly impresses upon people its right to be constantly recognised by a call.

“Let us take Baysford and look in at the Cleeves,” was a saying of diurnal occurrence when girls were about to start for their morning drive, or men and their sisters for an evening ride. The Gate-house was such a pleasant place to look in upon during those luxuriously soft, temperatured summer months. The big room that the girls had converted into a lobby became a regular haunt for the youth of both sexes for some miles around. They would get off their horses and tie them up to the chains, and utterly forget the obligation that was upon them to keep these heated animals in motion when once they got into the place that had been made bright by means of Indian matting and trophies of past chases. Mr. Cleeve sitting in elegant solitude sipping Hungarian wine from The Chase cellars, would be shocked in many of his finer feelings by the sound of the “cloop” the withdrawal of the corks from the bottles of brightly-fizzing cider caused, with which his daughters and their guests would be refreshing themselves either in the lobby or back garden. This latter was a delightful place, with a couple of high privet hedges in it that were rather purposeless as divi-

sions, since the beds on either side of it were of a precisely similar character, but that were very nice to sit under, sipping cider in the dying light of the hot summer evenings. It was well stocked with those good old gooseberry and currant bushes whose growth was cultivated to the size of a haystack, and on which the fruit attained the proportion of peas. There were plenty of vigorous pear and spreading apple trees about it, and large flowering myrtles and square beds of anemones. It was wanting in the features of a modern garden of any order; but those who came from afar to sit in wicker chairs and drink sparkling cider, never found it wanting in any of the features of a perfectly agreeable haunt.

The Miss Cleeves had no riding horses now; that is to say, none that were reserved especially for their use, as the early days of their residence at The Chase. Sir Victor would have had it so still, but they refused, on the plea that they could not keep horses down at the Gate-house, and that they would prefer borrowing of him when they wanted to ride. So the weedy bay mare and the brown gelding of matchless trotting powers had been sold, and nothing remained theirs in name up at The Chase stables save the pony that Sir Victor had given to his guardian. Sir Victor was quite inclined to keep up a stud befitting his income; he had a habit of adding to it lavishly whenever he saw a horse he liked. And his cousins had no desire to be the cause of a couple more in his stables than he absolutely insisted upon. They felt that he did not require the slightest incentive from them to extravagance in horseflesh.

He had given up the plan of going into the army. Madge, when she had heard of it, had discountenanced it strongly. "Men leave a regiment when they've made the *faux pas* he has," she said. "Don't let him go into a hive of bees, papa!—tell him that home service, under such circumstances, will be worse than his life here." And Mr. Drummond Cleeve told his ward what his daughter had said. And his ward suffered the conviction that it was so to sink into his soul.

He was a very constant visitor at the Gate-house. He

could not bear that they should drift apart from one another; and soon, instead of feeling pain in it, he found that his only pleasure in life was in their society. But he went to them in the morning; he was never to be seen in the coterie the Miss Cleeves assembled about themselves in the latter part of the day.

Madge had heard mention of Claude Ogilvie's name from the lips of Lady Cleeve once or twice during those hours of intercourse in the which Miss Cleeve had condescended to be affable enough to draw her ladyship out. And the tone of that mention had shown her—she was an acute observer—that Claude had been more than the mere casual acquaintance Lady Cleeve declared him to be. Her face kindled, therefore, one day when Sir Victor told them that he'd had a letter from the Baby—as they used to call a fellow of the name of Ogilvie that he'd known at Aldershott—and that the said Baby was coming to stay at The Chase in August. Hope had almost died out in Miss Cleeve's heart, but she rekindled its torch now. Something might eventuate from this visit of one whom she felt persuaded had been an old lover of Lucille's, which might lead to a separation between the baronet and his wife. "And putting myself out of the question," she thought—a thing she never did, by-the-bye—"any means that would bring about so desirable an end ought to be gladly welcomed by his friends."

In fact I, who am pulling the string of this puppet, need not affect to doubt the meaning I have put into her mind. She desired nothing less than that Lady Cleeve should levant—for the good of her lord.

Mrs. Mitchell had come and adapted herself to a very fair-sized niche in The Chase. Reports came down to the village, through the usual medium, of royal rows between the mother and daughter. Hard words were bandied freely between them, it was said, and an opinion got abroad, that Mrs. Mitchell held a rod of some sort over her daughter's head, by which means she maintained her position at The Chase. Sir Victor never volunteered any information respecting his home-life to his cousins. "Your mother-in-law is with you at The Chase, I hear!"

Madge said to him with soft sympathy one day. And he replied, "Yes, she's there!" in a tone that showed that he would rather not be softly sympathised with about her.

Mrs. Mitchell was a fine sight to look upon, if you were not related to or connected with her in any way. She went for drives in an open carriage with her daughter, in raiment of many colours and the broadest smiles. She attended divine service in bonnets that did away with thoughts of devotion, not alone in the hearts of the Sunday-school children, but also in that of Mrs. Lisle. "They are audacious, my dear," she said to Miss Cleeve, "that woman your cousin has married and her mother. I try not to see things that disturb me when I am in His house, but those feathers are—well, too much!"

Mrs. Lisle had striven hard to make a stand against paying those monthly calls to which her husband had limited her intercourse with The Chase when Lady Cleeve was there alone to receive her. To a Magdalen in rags in the gutter Mrs. Lisle would have been most exaltedly gracious and merciful; but she had no faith in repentance in richer robes than she herself could attain unto. While Lady Cleeve wore such feathers, and attired herself in "silks that would stand alone," Mrs. Lisle could not meekly tolerate the idea of subjecting her own homespun garments to the defiling atmosphere of Lucille's ungodly presence.

But Mr. Lisle was inflexible. "I call on my parishioners once in every month," he said, "and Lady Cleeve is one of my parishioners—therefore I shall call upon her."

"But I don't see why your poor wife is to be dragged there against her will," Mrs. Lisle had responded. And then he had told her that since she had chosen to make it a point of conscience to go there when the other Cleeves were resident at The Chase, he could not let her blindly fall away from what she had once believed to be right, now that circumstances had rendered the performance of a duty not quite so agreeable.

They were not things of joy, those professional calls!

But Mr. Lisle considered it to be a portion of his duty to make them periodically ; consequently he made them with religious severity. His wife, who only cared for a secular footing at The Chase, was always rosy with rage of a Christian and womanly order when she was constrained to go and pay this poverty-stricken compliment of calling upon the "audacious creature" whose feathers disturbed the serenity and holy calm of Baysford hebdomadally.

About this time Charlie Cleeve was conducting herself in a horribly undutiful manner. The owner of one of the horses that was most frequently tied up at the Gatehouse palings—the son, indeed, of the lady who had told Drummond Cleeve that it behoved him to protest against the infringement of decency and order at The Chase—fell in love ! He was a young man possessed of a broad face and broad acres, and a high colour and reputation ; and his falling in love was a thing of moment in that county side ! All his relations had to resign themselves to the prospect when they saw how resolutely his horse's head was set towards Baysford on all occasions ! All his relations deemed that there was something in Cumming after all, and that the final demolition of the standing order of things must be near when Miss Charlie Cleeve refused him.

Drummond Cleeve was as angry as any of them, and Madge took a very high stand on the topic too, and Charlie was made to feel herself a castaway and a sinner. Her father hurled the Baby and his own debts at her ; and declared that her obdurate obstinacy was wearing him to the grave. He traced all his misfortunes to the presentiment he had always had that this would occur ! He had ever been in the habit of immolating himself on the shrine of others, and this was how he was to be repaid ! "Really, Charlie," Madge said, seriously, "I think if you have no personal objection to Mr. Tregoar, you should think a little of papa—it's such a match ! and you know how he's worried."

"I have no particular dislike to Mr. Tregoar, but I have a particular objection to marrying him," Charlie

replied; "and as I think a little of myself as well as of papa, I don't mean to do it. I didn't force a choice on papa. Why should he force one upon me?"

"There is a slight difference in the relative positions.

When children take the responsibility of guiding, directing, and maintaining their parents upon themselves, *then* you may talk about——"

"Now do stop, Madge," Charlie interrupted, impatiently; "you make me think and say things that wouldn't come into my head else—if maintaining one gives a claim on one's obedience, it's Victor has a claim on mine now, for he's 'maintaining' the whole pack of us."

"You put it very coarsely," Madge said haughtily. "directly you are annoyed you forget that you are a lady."

"And remember other things. Well perhaps I do; but if there's coarseness in my saying it, there is surely more coarseness in our all doing it? If it is a vulgar thing on my part to say that I am supported at this present moment by my cousin Victor, what is it on papa's part to allow of such support being granted? At any rate," she continued, abruptly, "I am not going to clear any of the difficulties that I did not bring upon myself by marrying a man whom I don't care for."

Charlie Cleeve was not the type of girl that talks about the "offers she has had." Some women imagine that to have received a number of these things adds very greatly to their credit in the eyes of men, never gauging the quality of the article offered, or qualifying their statement with a history of the countless little arts and allurements put forth to win the honours. And never reflecting that the man who proposes without encouragement is a fool, while the woman who rejects after giving such is a worse.

But though she did not talk about it to Victor herself, he heard of it, and rejoiced heartily over Mr. Tregoar's discomfiture. "I shouldn't have thought so much of Charlie if she had married him," he thought. And then a dim idea that he wouldn't think so much of Charlie if she married anybody, darted across his mind; men are

apt to be thus ungenerous if they cannot marry a woman themselves through stress of fate—they are still hypercritical on her choice of any one else.

In a worldly point of view there was every excuse for Drummond Cleeve's wrath against the child who had deprived him of a son-in-law of whom he might have borrowed money. Old bills were pressing upon him sorely; those who held them were becoming what he termed "disgustingly importunate," and it would scarcely have been a becoming thing on the part of a guardian to borrow the wherewithal of freeing himself from the Jews from his ward. Poor Charlie was made to feel herself a miserable sinner for some time after the failure of the suit of the gentleman with the broad face and lands.

The news which Mrs. Mitchell had brought to her daughter respecting Claude Ogilvie had not been pleasant to her ladyship. "He spoke most respectful!" Mrs. Mitchell said. "I met him in Pall Mall," (the *recontre* in such a place with such a person must have been delightful!) "and he didn't seem to know me till I stopped him direct and said, If you are what I take you to be, Mr. Claude, you'll be glad to see an old friend."

"I wish you had let him alone," Lucille said peevishly; "I've told you over and over again how fastidious Mr. Ogilvie is."

"He wasn't so wonderful fastidious that time we were at Woolwich, but what——"

"Oh! never mind, tell me what he said of me."

"He spoke of you most respectful."

"Did he say he would come?"

"He said he would visit you if it were perfectly agreeable to you."

"Oh! he didn't say it like that," Lucille said impatiently. "If you'd tell me his words I should know his meaning; but I shall never know it if you try to make it clear in your own words."

"Well, then," Mrs. Mitchell retorted angrily, "he said, when I asked him if he was coming to The Chase to see Lucille—Not to see you, but to see his friend, Sir Victor Cleeve, and his friend's wife."

And then Lucille understood that Claude desired to bury the past, and to make her acquaintance in a better line of life, untrammelled by retrospection. She understood this perfectly, and as all that was warm in her nature was concentrated on Claude, she did not feel grateful for his prudence in her heart.

Baysford could boast of neither a lawyer nor a surgeon within its bounds. It was a purely agricultural parish, and people had no time to be either litigious or sick. The perfect and proper cultivation of their lands left them no season for quarrelling. It was always either seedtime or harvest, the season for purchasing lean or killing fat cattle.

Now, the society in a purely agricultural parish in the west of England is apt to be less cultivated than its fields. We must go to the eastern counties for good specimens of that rapidly rising and enlightened order, the tenant farmers. In Norfolk especially, the men who hire the land are to the full as well mannered and bred and horsed as their landlords, very often; they are gentlemen who bring the results of a scientific education to bear upon what was at one time the merely mechanical operation of tilling the ground. Their habits and manners, their establishments and style of life are those of other men of moderate position, moderate wealth, and moderate ambition; they give hunt breakfasts when the hounds meet near their houses, and the titled master of the hounds is received by their wives and daughters very much as he sees his own wife and daughters receive other men in his own house. The young ladies have each their own saddle horse and when they go out with the hounds they "cut the field" if a dubious character appears in it, with as sure a feeling of their disapproval being the cause of clearing it of the obnoxious stranger, as if the wife of an earl had done it.

But in the west of England tenant farmers have not risen to this average of cultivation and refinement yet; their occupations are smaller, their gains are naturally much less; they are not very far superior to the men whom they employ save in this, that they do employ

them. Their wives and daughters, if they do not make butter and milk the cows and concentrate every one of the few ideas nature has gifted them with upon household cares, have the indelible stamp of being the offspring of generations who have done these things. They are very nice, honest-hearted, pleasant women, but the titled master of the hounds would not catch himself talking to them as to his brother nobles' wives and daughters, if the exigencies of sport brought him in the way of their fathers' hospitality.

There were two or three of these jolly homely old farmers and farmhouses in Baysford, and to their woman-kind the declension of the Cleeves from The Chase to the Gate-house was a thing of awful import! The young ladies—the Miss Cleeves—were always very frank, friendly and free-spoken, and now that they had come down to dwell in the village and keep only one servant, Mrs. Dempster and Mrs. Pigott thought they ought to ask them to tea, to a regular grand, heavy, hearty west-country tea in the best parlour, with the asparagus in the grate and the Chelsea china in an open cupboard in the corner! Mrs. Dempster started the idea, and Mrs. Pigott rode straight at it immediately, and gave them a nervous but cordial invitation. “You won’t go, I suppose?” Mrs. Lisle said when she heard of it, for a report of the splendour of the contemplated repast soon diffused itself through the village. “My dears! oh no—of course you’re very free from pride like Alice, dear child—but she never went, my dear Miss Cleeve, though they asked her over and over again.”

“*I’m going,*” Charlie said, decidedly. “We’re to have almonds for tea, I think, for I went to tell Mrs. Pigott that we were coming this morning, and she was blanching about a pound of them.”

“And custards, too,” Madge went on, laughing; “for she sent over, the dear kind woman, to ask for some bay-leaves just now—and a junket after tea; it will make us ill of course; but a great institution is junket, and I never miss the opportunity of eating one.”

Mrs. Lisle could not fathom the eccentricity of thes

people. She herself shrank with horror from being supposed to do more than enter the Pigott and Dempster domiciles in any other way than that of a beneficent being from above, not from heaven exactly, but from some holy and high earthly regions. And here, now, the Miss Cleeves were going to "accept their hospitality." She did not know that her reticence was the effect of an undeveloped, unacknowledged dread that her own intellectual and social superiority to "these people" was so trifling as to be imperceptible. Whereas, the line of demarcation was well marked between the Miss Cleeves and their inviters, and no one felt this more thoroughly and completely than the worthy women themselves.

So they went to the tea in the best parlour with the asparagus in the fire-place, and enjoyed themselves after a simple, homely, hearty, humble fashion, just as if the mind of one was not fraught with care for the future of one who was dearer to her than herself, and the mind of the other fraught with plans of a less magnanimous order.

They submitted to be fêted, and of course horribly bored, these young ladies with the sweetest amiability. And they won golden opinions, and were accredited with the possession of all manner of good qualities, because they were capable of taking tea with a natural air in the midst of surroundings that even their entertainers judged were not quite such as they were accustomed to. Mrs. Pigott declared Charlie to be a "spirity one;" but said that Madge was a "sweet young lady, mild as mother's milk." And so she was outwardly, during this period of peace.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STRIVINGS AFTER A SENSATION.

MR. SELWYN JAMES had taken, as his wife declared he would, a very nice house in town for the two months he intended residing there. It was in an unexceptionable locality—Alice had nothing to complain about on that score; but there was a closet in it containing a skeleton. Alice had nothing in it wherewith to amuse herself, and

her husband had given forth the order that she was not to walk out alone!

Previous to the issuing of this order, pedestrianism had not been particularly dear to the heart of Mrs. James. But directly it became forbidden fruit she "felt very weak" for want of it. Selwyn James had heard Mrs. Burroughes relate how she walked about London alone very often, in preference to paying an exorbitant sum for an unsatisfactory hired brougham; and he was virtuously determined that the acts of his wife should differ in all respects from the acts of the woman at The Oaks. "I am not going to have my wife taken for a milliner's apprentice," he said, when she promulgated her wishes on the point the first time.

"No one ever took Dora for *that*," she replied; and he answered—

"Perhaps not—she may have been taken for something else that I don't want to have you taken for." And then he took his hat and went out. But before he went, he gave her a prospect upon which to dwell during the hours of his absence—he promised to drive her in the Park at five, behind the grand stepping grey about which there had been the disturbance which brought about the final disunion between Dora and herself.

He went away, and left her with little to do and lots to think about, and this state of things—when thought is not well regulated—is unsafe. With a man who had not persistently thrown her back upon herself, she would have developed into something that it was not dangerous to leave alone during a long summer day, with the roar of Piccadilly sounding in her ears. But he had persistently left her to her own resources, and caused her to regard him as one whom it was a very venial sin to deceive. "If he wouldn't let me go out by myself why wouldn't he take me out with him now, when he knows how I want to look about?" she asked. And no one being by to reply, she answered herself by declaring that "it was because he was selfish and didn't care for her, and evidently the wr-retch had his own independent amusements." And when she had dwelt upon this idea

until it became a tangible wrong, she sat down and indited a note to Claude Ogilvie, informing him that they were in town!—only just that information, nothing more—and surely no woman who holds her heart in honour need shrink from allowing her husband to know that she has indited this information for the benefit of any man to whom he gives his hand in friendship? But she was a coward! and a coward makes guilt out of nothing. She was ebbing away from the open sea of candid fearlessness, through no terrible temptation, but just because no kind strong hand was extended to cheer and aid her in buffeting the waves that seemed mountainous to her weak spirit. She was learning to think herself ill used, and she had not the courage to say that she thought so, when her mistake might have been pointed out to her. She was learning to think herself ill used—and retaliation and revenge are the refuge of the weak, the sure solace that is sought by the silly wrought to spite. She was no more wholly blamable than is any one else in this world of folly and sin. I have a great faith in the “good that is in all men,” whether it be ever brought out or not. She erred and was erred against; she was weak and wavering, and some taint in the old blood impeded its circulation and caused it to throb less fully and nobly than it should have done in her veins. But she was no more wholly blamable than were those who had told her good things in such a way that the vital truth of them never came home to her, or than the man who was weakening her limp hold of right through some misapprehension which again was not solely attributable to himself. There is only one sweeping judgment that it is good to pronounce, and that is, that in every human being whom a merciful God has made, there is some—aye, even much good.

But this goodness brought out alone would not have assisted in the complication and *dénoûment* of this story which I have conceived—this story which has no purpose to serve, no theory to support, no mission in fact, save to entertain more or less those who may chance to read it. The sole serious appeal it would make, indeed, is

comprised in these few words, which shall terminate this brief apology—Be every man tolerant and lenient to the faults and follies of others.

Alice James's was not an elastic nature—she could not immediately rebound into animation and amiability after a period of depression. When her husband came home at five, to take her into the Park in a well-hung cabriolet behind the grey who picked up his feet so proudly, she had the marks of the sulks she had been indulging so freely all the day upon her face still, and this annoyed him very naturally. And then, when they had got into the crush, hers were the only eyes that did not beam with admiration upon that horse, and this increased her husband's annoyance still more naturally. Alice was very pretty, and her husband had looked forward with very proper, wholesome marital pride and complacency to exhibiting her (and the grey) in Hyde Park; and now the shine was taken off this horse's stepping by the sulky expression of her fair face.

"You're an uncommonly cheerful companion, Alice," he said to her at last; "there's a great pleasure in introducing any one to new scenes who shows such interest and admiration in them as you do!"

"There's nothing to animate me," she replied. "I don't know any one, and driving at a snail's pace between a lot of carriages isn't very exciting of itself."

He tried to be good humoured.

"You'll like it better in a few days, when Lady Lisle has called and taken you out; you'll soon know plenty of people through her."

"They won't come near me in London—they belong to quite a different set to yours. Why Ida laughed at the idea of coming to a ball at my house, when I said I was going to give one!"

"The devil they wont!" he replied. "And why not, may I ask?" (He had not the trick of flight of his brother, and he had not the same delicate perception of the line over which his wings would be useless.)

"Because I am your wife, I suppose!" she blurted out awkwardly; "it isn't my fault, you know!" she con-

tinued, more deprecatingly. And then Selwyn James begged her with a great air of pitying contempt not to give forth the sentiments of an effete race as if she had a right to share in and sympathize with them, because that was of course preposterous in the extreme. And while she was smarting through every fibre under his scornful reproof, Claude Ogilvie passed them on horseback, looking bright and good-tempered and handsome and sunny, and Alice compared his cloudless face with her husband's angry one—and her husband lost by the comparison.

A few days passed, and Claude Ogilvie called, and life for an hour was brighter to pretty Alice James. "I go back to Aldershott to night," he said when he had found, rather to his dismay, that Alice was prepared to take up the thread of intimacy again precisely where he had cut it short on leaving Royston Hall. "I go back to Aldershott to night; have you any message for Conway?"

"I had rather that you did not tell Conway that you have seen me," she said, with a nervous air that she was cultivating rather assiduously in these days; "Conway might mention it to Selwyn, and—but I'd better not tell you!"

"Yes, do tell me," he pleaded, and as he so pleaded he mentally swore that he would experience great difficulty in getting leave, and confine himself strictly to his duties at Aldershott for some time to come. He wanted to avoid all other reprehensible excitements; there was a light breeze getting up in the west that would oblige him to trim his sails with exceeding care for some time to come. However, though he thus mentally swore, he said aloud—

"Yes, do tell me!"

"Well, perhaps Mr. James might not like to hear you have been—to see me."

She had no reason for supposing that Selwyn James would have objected to the man who had partaken of his hospitality paying him the common civility of a call, but she said it, and sighed, and looked as if she meant it. And Claude Ogilvie was not the man to refuse a challenge of this sort, though it might take all his skill to weather that breeze from the west by-and-bye.

"And you," he said, softly, "did you mean it as a caution for me to keep away when you sent me that line, telling me you were here? Did you not wish to see me?"

Heaven help the men who have taken these women-and-water creatures to wife, who suffer themselves to drift into semi-sentimental flirtations, which are humiliating and discreditable, if not dangerous! They may begin and end in idle words; but the words are so idle that none but fools should utter them.

She told him in reply, that she had wished to see him, but that she had *hoped* he would have had prudence enough to have stayed away—as Mr. James would never forgive her if he heard of it! And then she went into details of her dulness and her husband's shortcomings, and appealed to his pity; and finally wound up by asking when she should see him again. She erred through excess of vanity, which had no healthy outlet, and through folly and ignorance. Had she realized the truth, that light mention of her husband to another man, and contemplated trickery and deceit towards him, were base abject, unwomanly things, she would not have done them. But she did not realize that truth—therefore she was as tolerant and lenient to herself as she was severe to others.

When he took his departure, he thought her a most interesting woman, and one with whom it would be good fun to flirt. "No fellow will get out of his depth with her," he thought. And, as he thought it, his recollections were very vivid of one with whom he had got out of his depth in days gone by. "I'd give a year of my life now for her not to have married Cleeve," he muttered, as he reflected on the seeming difficulty Lucille experienced in suffering those by-gones to rest in peace.

Though the heads of her own house elected to be oblivious of her existence, many old friends of the Jameses recognised it promptly, and countless carriages rolled up from Highgate and Hampstead, in order that the occupants thereof might pay their *devoirs* to her. She, as the bride of the eldest son of so all-important a

"house," was of far more importance in their eyes than any Lisle could possibly be. They offered her handsome substantial attention, and proffered her a handsome substantial hospitality. And her husband, who had hoped that his union with her would have ensured him the like favours from another class, was fain now to declare that "this sort of thing" was more congenial to his taste and feelings, and contemptuously to deny any intention either in the past, present, or future of being a mere hanger-on to the aristocracy. He knew his position thoroughly, he declared—it was an unassailable one in the ranks of the middle class, and it was his pride to say that in his opinion it could not be bettered. But all the same, he did grind the teeth of impotent mortification and rage when questioned by inquisitive old family friends on the topic of his wife's relations, Sir Bernard and Lady Lisle. These latter accorded him but the most meagre notice. They smiled upon him and their cousin, his wife, in a wintry fashion in the park when they passed. And they sent their cards to the door of his house in charge of their footman. And they were good enough to spare his wife the trouble of descending from her brougham when she went in person to return the delicate attention by declaring themselves not at home to her. And Selwyn James's gratitude for all these things was not boundless.

The beauty had come out, as proposed, at the first drawing-room, and had made a sensation—not the sensation beauty was wont of old to make in fiction, when her name was on every man's tongue and her portrait in every printshop. But the sensation that is made every season in real life by some girl prettier than the rest of the band of aspirants who circulate in her orbit; that is to say, she was spoken of in half-a-dozen drawing-rooms, and half-a-dozen men went and poised themselves upon the rails in Rotten Row, when they had nothing better to do, for the sake of seeing her ride by with her father. And the dress that she wore at the ball, which her mother gave in celebration of her advent into the world, was described at full length in the *Morning Post*. And altogether she was a great success.

But they—the Jameses—neither witnessed nor shared in it, and they were wroth with their relations, and Alice was dolefully disappointed with her first season in London. Had the Lisles been good, steady-going, old-world-people, who remained all the year round at their seat in Cambridgeshire, they would have been good to talk about, at least; and Alice might, and probably would have vaunted any degree of intimacy and identity with them. But such vaunts would be worse than useless now, she felt, and therefore she was deprived of the poor pleasure of making them. She began to shrink and quiver under the frequent mention of them which well-meaning acquaintances would persist in making. The elaborately-arranged casual allusion to festivities in which it was presupposed that she had taken a part, were felt by her to be pointed sarcasms—and very sharply-pointed, too. And the report of Ida's career in the *Court Circular* read to her like a sharp commentary on her own marriage with the scion of a race of shopkeepers. She utterly forgot how much more comfortable—nay, even luxurious by comparison—her present life was than the one she had led in the little Devonshire parsonage. She only remembered that it was not as honourable and glorious as the one Ida seemed destined to lead. And this remembrance impaired its value in her eyes, and caused her to solemnly asseverate to herself—and Claude Ogilvie—that it “would not suffice to her.” So the Baby obligingly enabled her to introduce a *soupçon* of flirtation into it, and continued the assurance to his conscience and his confidantes that no fellow would get out of his depth with her.

Neither of these young people had anything particular to say to the other, but despite that usually all-sufficient bar to constant correspondence, they wrote to one another perpetually. The gallant young officer had his letters addressed openly enough, but rare discretion had to be observed with regard to those which were intended for the sole perusal of Mrs. Selwyn James. Occasionally they were directed to her maid, and at other times to a post-office, where they were held in safety for her at a

trifling charge. And she deemed these precautions perfect in their protecting power, and slept the calm sleep of security in consequence. Her present peace of mind was undisturbed by the reflection that a man capable of doing it was capable of talking about it, or that her maid might "up and tell master all about her goings on" on the first occasion of her giving that functionary offence. She believed Claude to be honourable and her maid devoted, and herself, curiously enough, to be above suspicion. Her life was a lie now, but she lived it in perfect serenity, and held herself justified in casting stones at any one in scriptural terms. She wrote and received her silly letters, and made light mention of Dora, and scorned Lady Cleeve, and was generally virtuously un pitying to the falling and the fallen. And Claude, who had let his good resolutions go by for the time, affected to refrain from her husband's house, and met her in the Pantheon for the purpose of looking at the cockatoo apparently, for when they met they had nothing to say; and he talked about and laughed at her to some other men, who went away and denounced him as a boaster and the lady as weak. The young lady who had been conspicuous for the rich bloom of her innocence when Victor Cleeve loved her, was in a fair way to win for herself a most undesirable reputation—that of a married flirt.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A MESSENGER OF EVIL.

LADY CLEEVE was not unmindful of the duties of hospitality. Mrs. Mitchell was far from being a nice guest in a country house, but she was a small evil compared with one that followed. Mr. Blackman came, and was effusive to his niece, and most flatteringly cordial and affectionate to his nephew. He was not the type of man, despite his display of feeling and good fellowship, that one likes to welcome for an indefinite period under

one's roof-tree. His habit doubtless was costly as his purse could buy, but all the same it was time-worn, not to say disgracefully decayed. Good broad cloth may be a very minor consideration if the heart only be in the right place. Nevertheless, we like to see it on the persons of those who visit us. We could easily dispense with a little of the internal rectitude, but the external appearance must be free from spot or blemish.

Mr. Blackman "had fallen upon evil days," he said, and he had got sadly battered in the fall, even to the brim of his hat. He walked over from the Baysford railway station with one hand inserted into the breast of his coat, and the other bearing a disreputable carpet-bag of a suspiciously collapsed aspect, and arrived at The Chase about seven o'clock one hot July evening. He had met with a slight rebuff at the lodge gates at the mouth of the keeper thereof. "They never gives to your sort up at the house," that functionary had told him, "so you just save yourself the walk, and clear out." But Mr. Blackman had passed on triumphantly with a suave smile, and had inwardly marked the gatekeeper for vengeance. "It's the world's justice," he thought; "the worthiest are slighted if not well dressed. When I go away from here that clown shall show me more consideration, if there's a tailor in the neighbourhood."

Lady Cleeve was not unmindful of the duties of hospitality, but she would rather have been left freedom of judgment and action in exercising it. She had not issued an invitation to her uncle and late manager; he had never been dear to her heart, and he was abhorrent to it now, at least his presence in her house was abhorrent to her. She was never quite sure that Victor might not suddenly arouse himself from the apparent lethargy of feeling into which he had sunk when at home, and offer some violent demonstration of antagonism to her and hers. And she wished to avoid such occasion for said awakening as Mr. Blackman might reasonably be supposed to offer.

On the whole it was but a frigid welcome that Lucille gave her relative, but he seemed to be perfectly satisfied with it and not at all abashed. No false shame prevented

his making an excellent dinner. His young host was undisguisedly depressed and disgusted, but Mr. Blackman delicately avoided appearing to notice his depression and disgust, and did not suffer it to interfere with the free flow of the wine. Sir Victor was thinking whether anything would ever again purify his house from the taint of these people's presence. Vice and vulgarity made a tangible atmosphere around him, and he feared that his soul and his house would become so impregnated with it that all after-purification, even should such ever be possible, would be of no avail. He was in a vortex, and he would be whirled to a more complete social destruction than had overtaken him yet. He felt as he looked at his wife, with the beauty of the fallen upon her, and heard the tones of his relations, her mother, and uncle at his board—he began to feel that it might be that again he had been wrong in repudiating the notion of ever repudiating the woman who bore his name? An order of release from the frightful bonds that bound him down to social degradation would be welcome, “no matter how gained,” he thought, as he looked round on the circle and knew that no such order could come.

“Will you stay here to night, uncle?” Lady Cleeve asked when Mr. Blackman came to her for some of the tea that she was dispensing to her mother and herself. And he told her yes, and for a good many nights, he trusted. Whereat his niece bit her lip and looked at him vindictively.

“Then you can take mamma back to London on Friday,” she said as calmly as she could, and Mrs. Mitchell entered into the controversy with spirit, for her mettle had been got up by a disagreement she had had with her daughter respecting the relative merit of tea “made from a hurn and tea made from a smutty kittle, the black upon which, need worry no one boilin’ on the ’ob.”

“Your mamma aint going on Friday, my dear,” she said. “I find myself very well in this climate, and being the mother of the mistress of this house, without which I should never a’ come, I shall stay here a little longer.”

“And I feel that Lucy is as glad to welcome me as

she would be to welcome her father," Mr. Blackman said smilingly; "so I have no scruples about staying on for a while in the noble mansion of the Cleeves, without a special invite from the mistress of it."

She flared up into a sudden rage that cowed him, common bully that he was, for a minute.

"You'll find some difficulty in doing that," she said angrily. "I told you to keep away—I've bought and paid for your promise to keep out of my sight: don't tell me again that you'll stay here while it pleases you, or I'll order my servants to throw you out of the house like a dog to-night?"

"Hear her!" he said derisively, after a moment or two; "hear her talk of how she'll order her servants to kick away the ladder that helped her up? I can do more for you still, my lady," he went on savagely; "I can keep your secrets."

"It's worth your while to do so," she said with careless contempt; "if you betray them, you kill the goose with the golden eggs; therefore I ain't afraid of you."

"It was not from your husband that I meant I would keep them still if you treated me properly," he said, coming up and seating himself on the couch by his niece, "but from another man. And now while I think of it. I'll tell you of a piece of clemency on the part of the Government. A man who was transported seven years ago for fourteen years, has had half of his sentence commuted, and has come back to the old country to live a better life with his family—when he can find them. Ah! you're speechless with joy, I see—women are always so glad to hear of any thing of the sort. I knew I should bring my welcome with me, Lady Cleeve, if I brought you such news as this!"

Lady Cleeve grew dogged and sullen. "Very well," said she, "tell all you know—bring all the disgrace you can upon me, and how will it better you? You'll have to go back and work for it instead of eating your bread in idleness as you've done ever since I married."

"And you," he interrupted, "I should like to know what you'd do?"

"Not come to you to help me again, be sure of that," she said bitterly.

"We had better be friendly, Lucy—give me a cheque and I'll bring him down to you so that nobody would know he was a returned convict—sure he's a travelled gentleman, only he hasn't taken the usual tour. After these years of absence he expects your doors to open warmly to him."

"Then he expects more than he will get; brutalized as he was when he went away, he is not likely to have improved; and I don't want to be blackened more in this place. Patience will do a good deal. If I only live here long enough people will take me for what I am, by-and-by, and forget what they have heard about me; but if I have to haul up my relations with me, I may as well give up the game at once."

The refusal of Lady Cleeve to acknowledge the supreme merit of the beverage that was the result of the smutty kettle's presence in the room, sank into its proper position as a very minor grievance, indeed, as Mrs. Mitchell listened to her brother and her child. "He were a worthless wagabond when in drink, and a many times I've wished him dead—but he may have given that over now, Lucy?"

"Very well, mother; if you'd like to go and see for yourself you can—but remember there can be no coming back. You choose between us; and if you choose him, except in the way of giving you enough to be comfortable for life, I have done with you. I don't mean it hardly, mother, but I can't help myself—the world has been hard to me."

"He *were* a worthless wagabond, and perhaps I'm better here," Mrs. Mitchell pursued meditatively; "there's a good deal to be thought on before one goes back to blows for your last 'apenny, and the tremblins which you must nurse 'em through, or you're a brute in the eyes of the neighbours when you give it; a good deal to be thought on, and I ain't so young as I were; but seven years is a long time."

"If you go, you can't come back, you must see that, mother; so if you want to come back, you'd better forget the commutation and not go at all."

"You're a nice, affectionate, considerate daughter," Mr. Blackman observed with a suppressed chuckle; "an affectionate niece too if I'm not mistaken, and one that won't say a word more about having her poor old uncle kicked out."

Mr. Blackman possessed that most agreeable facility for a guest of rapidly making himself at home in a thorough and complete manner, that entirely exonerated his entertainers from taking any trouble on his behalf. He evinced no painful and hesitating modesty as regarded the giving of trouble and orders, and appropriating unto himself whatever it seemed good to him so to appropriate. He conducted himself with a degree of easy unembarrassed assurance, that had greatly in days gone by enhanced the value of his delineation of jocular stage villany; and Sir Victor Cleeve gave no sign of being alive to the embarrassing lack of embarrassment his guest displayed; but despite this unlooked for exhibition of endurance on her husband's part, Lady Cleeve loathed her uncle's presence, and longed for his departure with a fervour that was not the less fierce because it was systematically kept under.

This man was a continual reminder to her of the worst part of that past which she would have forgotten if she could; and still she dared not enforce his exit. She knew him to be a sordid scoundrel, therefore to be bought; but she dared not make an offer hastily, otherwise he might affix a price upon himself which she could never command. She was panting to get rid of him, for Claude Ogilvie was coming to The Chase in August, and she wanted to appear before the old lover, who had scorned her, in the fullest lustre of her present position, untarnished by any of these old tarnishing surroundings. And Mr. Blackman read that these desires were filling his niece's mind, and still he stayed on and gave no sign of an anxiety to come to terms with her. He wanted to test fully the extent of her resources before he drove her

to bay ; so he waited to see what she really had at command, and the truth or falsehood of what her mother, in the first exuberant foolishness of her pride of place, had merely boasted of her having.

For three weeks this obnoxious visitor remained, making his observations, maturing his plans, and re-organizing his wardrobe. At the end of that time Lucille's patience gave way, and she went to him, begging him, half angrily, half fearfully, to begone.

"Very well," he said, when she had made her plea, "but you've not forgotten what I told you the night I came, have you? I aint one to drop old friends. When I go from here I shall look up my old chum, then he'll learn where The Chase is, and who's its mistress."

"For God's sake don't send him here; keep him away from here, uncle! I've never had any peace in my life, you know that; let me have a little now—"

Her voice grew husky, and she paused abruptly. She would not shed tears before this man if she could avoid it, because she knew that he would only think she was acting—"trying it on" with him.

"It wont be my place to keep him away from this place, Lucy; he's a better right to come here than I have while you're in the house."

"It's so little money I can get into my hands at all," she said, without noticing his remark; "I'd stint myself willingly enough. Jewellery that he gave me when we were married—and that he wont pay for till he's of age, and needn't ask his guardian to let him have his own money—you shall have, if you like, to pawn or sell. And I'll send you more money in a few weeks. You'll give it to him, wont you? You wont cheat me and ruin me?"

"You must pledge yourself to do what's handsome, Lucy, when your husband has the handling of his own tin. Meantime, I'll do all I can, and take what you have and say nothing."

"But you will give it to him—you will, wont you?" she repeated eagerly.

"Yes, yes—all right."

"I couldn't bear to think of his wanting," she went on, hoarsely; "the bread I eat would choke me if I thought he was driven through want to the old—" she checked herself and looked appealingly at him.

"'Twould be hard that he should want while you rode in your carriage and pair," he said. "No, no, I'll promise that he shan't want while you have it to give him!"

"I worked for him when I could; I slaved and slaved, you *know* I did, and never said a word against what went with my earnings, till he took to the doings that were his ruin; and then—what could I do? Don't loose him on me, uncle. Oh! I never thought that I should curse the day that saw him come back free."

The tears rolled down her face heavily and bitterly for a few moments, and their course was plainly marked on the elaborately prepared surface of her cheeks. But still, though the tears coursed down with heavy bitterness, she keenly marked the man with whom she was striving to drive a bargain through them.

"Well Lucy," he said at last; "I don't want to injure you, poor girl, and you have had a hard life of it—no one knows that better than myself."

"Yes," she said sadly, "I've had my share of blows and beggary."

"You have, and I was always sorry for you; but now look here. I aint going to think all of you and nothing of myself. If I don't let him loose on you, and give him all you put into my hands to give him, you must never talk of telling your servants to kick your poor old uncle out again, because he wont stand that—this child wont—he wont stand that, I tell you."

"You mean that you'll come here—"

"Whenever I please, he interrupted, "and stay as long as I like; that's the least I can ask for doing your dirty work for you."

For a moment she thought that life at The Chase would not be worth having on such terms. But the next she remembered that she had lived through worse things than this, and that a year ago, before she had dreamt of ever parting company with this man, the

present aspect of affairs would have seemed like a view of Paradise. So she checked her refusal, and accepted the terms. And Mr. Blackman congratulated himself on having got himself, by his own unassisted talent, placed upon the free-list of The Chase.

He went away "for a time," as he took care to observe, shortly after this, with a couple of carpet-bags well filled, and with all the ornaments that Lucille dared to abstract from her dressing case at one time in his possession. The jewellery that the young baronet had given his bride was not priceless, but it was very nice—very far inferior both in quality and quantity to the jewellery that is usually employed in decorating the person of a baronet's wife in fiction, but quite as profuse and valuable as is bestowed by many—nay, by the majority of well-disposed husbands in fact. There was a hundred guinea bracelet of broad, massive gold, set with emeralds and rubies; and there were three or four wide gold ones of different styles of workmanship, ranging in price from eight to twelve guineas. And there was an exquisitely-mounted pink coral wreath and comb, and an emerald brooch with pendants, and a few minor articles of less value. His had been the sole hand to give wedding presents to his bride, and he had not held it, but had freely run up a heavy bill in order that she might have a small stock to start with. However, there had never been an occasion for the wearing of these things as yet, and she had no fear of an occasion arising. Therefore she handed over all but the least expensive bracelet and the emerald brooch, and one or two rings that she was in the habit of constantly wearing, to her uncle, who forthwith blessed her and departed.

"You won't let him want—you won't keep back any that I mean for him?" were the last words she said to Mr. Blackman. And he promised her afresh that he would faithfully fulfil her wishes.

"What sort of a fellow should I be if I didn't?" he said, wiping what he desired her to suppose was a tear upon his coat-cuff.

And she replied, "What, indeed!" and did not look

up in time to detect the subdued smile which followed the sweet tear of pity.

Mrs. Mitchell highly approved of her daughter's plan of action when she heard of it. "I felt that weak all the time Blackman has been here, and we liable to his walkin' in any hour of the day as may be, that I've not known what to do: and if it hadn't a' been for the wine I should never have kep' up!" she said, when Lucille told her of Blackman's promise, and the price she had paid for it.

"At any rate, mother, you havn't troubled yourself much. You've eaten your dinner every day with a good appetite, and never thought about whether he had anything or not."

"'Twas for you to see to that; and it don't become you to reproach me—it don't, Lucille. Talk of the serpent's tooth ——"

"Well, mother, have I been sharper?" Lucille asked.

"Not usual, Lucille; but when you mention my appetite in the same breath with wondering that I haven't troubled myself more about what I can't help no more than the babe which is unborn, I do feel hurt. My appetite, indeed! I may have eaten, but it's little good it's done me, I do assure you."

CHAPTER XXXV

"THAT'S WHERE THEY ARE LIVING NOW!"

AUGUST arrived, and with the month came the first of the expected guests to Baysford. The Lisles had the gratification of welcoming their pretty, well-married daughter as a visitor for an indefinite period. And there is much ado made about her at the Rectory, and Mrs. Lisle was busy and blissful to an extraordinary degree.

Selwyn James was going to Scotland on the 12th for the grouse-shooting, and, as he did not want to take his wife with him, or to leave her at Royston Hall where she would have been open to the advances of the "woman at The Oaks," he had despatched her for safety to the

paternal roof, with permission to remain there as long as she liked. He did not say it to her, but he told himself that it would be good for her to go down and be dull with her mother for a time—it would teach her to appreciate more highly the advantages she enjoyed under his auspices. He had not the faintest idea of the precautions she had taken against possible dulness while lying fallow under her parents' roof.

She was earlier in the field than Mr. Claude Ogilvie. The Baby knew that "she'd wait for him," however long he delayed going to The Chase—therefore he betrayed no over-anxiety, and Alice for several days partook of the waters of mortification and the bread of uncertainty; she began to think that he was not coming at all, and to revile her too confiding trust for having been led into evil and Baysford. But on the second Sunday after her arrival she was blessed by the sight of the back of the Baby's head rising above The Chase pew, as she entered the church for the purpose of paying her morning devotions.

Alice enjoyed going to church at Baysford in these days! It was balm, and oil, and wine to any wounds she might have received *in re* Victor Cleeve in days gone by, to go and flout his wife in the face of the faithful now. She kept her virtuous little peachy face averted from The Chase pew, where the woman who had been found out, sat, and knelt, and prayed to God perhaps as fervently as any other in that thinly-peopled little village church. Mrs. Selwyn James held her prayer-book—with the rubrics all done in red, and the separate set of crosses for Morning and Evening Service, and the sacred monogram wherever it could be placed conveniently—she held this book up close before her face with her well-gloved soft hands when the Creed was read, and she turned to the east in order that Lady Cleeve's back view might not interfere with her devotions. She was great—nay more, she was grand—in her unassailed young matronhood. Her head quivered with a little flutter of virtuous indignation if evil chance let Lucille out of The Chase pew before her, and she had to follow in the wake

of the sinner. She prayed heaven's forgiveness with a loud voice of apparent anguish for every sin of which that community supposed Lady Cleeve had ever been guilty—and here, be it observed, that those unsophisticated villagers were not chary of their suppositions. She appraised every article of Lucille's dress, and declared that "it was outrageous!" to her mamma, as she walked with that lady down the churchyard. She called on the Cleeves at the Gate-house, and made an elaborate apology for the omission on her part of the same civility towards The Chase. "Selwyn would never hear of my going near Lady Cleeve, you know," she said to Charlie. And when Charlie replied, "Oh, wouldn't he?—well, you needn't say any more about it then!" she added. "For of course, if a young married woman of my position noticed her, it would be an encouragement to such creatures. No, no! I'm not going to have it said that Mrs. Selwyn James visits her." And then Mrs. Selwyn James's weak young head elevated itself, in utter forgetfulness of those meetings in the Pantheon, and letters which had not been directed to her at her husband's house. In fact, she was as uncompromisingly hostile and rigid to Lady Cleeve as tyroes usually are to proficients. And Mrs. Lisle revelled in this hostility and rigidity, and declared that Alice had "always had such very correct views." Mrs. Lisle had never been a non-emotional or cold-hearted mother; but it is a fact that her affection for her child had deepened and strengthened considerably since the latter's departure for a husband's protection. In the same way she rather stood in awe of and disliked Selwyn James as a man—he was too cool, collected, and reticent to please a woman who would rush from the cradle to the grave; but as a son-in-law she absolutely luxuriated in him. She was wont to give out his sayings and doings with unction to every one who would listen to her. She cited him as a mighty authority, and declared that he was a man whom "all must respect." Being rather afraid of him herself, the fact of his choice having fallen upon Alice endowed that young lady with a sort of mysteriously solemn and slightly incomprehensible charm.

Mrs. Lisle began to think that there must be a good deal in this child of hers after all, and to rather revere herself for having given birth to something so very superior. She was sorry that it was not winter and piercingly cold, in order that she might mark her sense of Alice's merit by having a huge fire in her room and five blankets on her bed every night. As it was, she contented herself with telling people that "Mrs. Selwyn James felt the heat so much—the rooms, of course, were so very close after Royston Hall." Alice, being unchecked by her husband's presence, gave herself as many airs and graces as a school-girl with her first lover, or watch, or long dress could have done. She affected great lassitude after the severe season, and enunciated sentiments of relief for that she was freed for a time from the onerous duties of house-keeping and society. She was ten times more disagreeable and troublesome in the house than she had been in her maiden days; but her mother delighted in these recently-developed traits—they added to her own importance, for she was the mother of the fractiously fastidious lady. Alice assumed on their first meeting a tolerant air of compassionate condescending friendship for the Miss Cleeves. She sympathised with them about their cousin's marriage, and pitied them for being compelled to leave The Chase, and condoned their former offences with regard to Sir Victor and herself in the sweetest manner. They really marvelled at her—at her and at her silliness, and the supreme delight she evidently experienced at playing *grande dame* to the village. And before she had time to find the task of dazzling the Pigotts and Dempsters a wearying one—before this period of peace had palled upon her utterly—Claude Ogilvie came to The Chase, and she gained the knowledge of the fact from seeing the back of his head above the top of the great pew on the second Sunday of her visit to her old home.

It was a hot Sunday morning, and had it not been for the prospect of seeing Lady Cleeve and her mother, and ignoring and despising them in a Christian manner, Alice would have stayed at home and read a new novel out on the Rectory lawn under the shade of a medlar

tree. And surely there would have been far more good in that occupation than in going to church for the sake of getting a better standpoint from which to hurl a stone at another woman? However that may be, she resisted the temptation of perusing what her father and mother would have termed "an unprofitable tissue of falsehoods," and went forth armed with her well-appointed prayer-book to bewail herself as a miserable sinner, and gaze fondly at the back of Claude Ogilvie's head.

He was in the pew alone with Lady Cleeve. Mrs. Mitchell's instinct had taught her that she was not wanted by her daughter, and her tastes led her to prefer remaining at home to toiling through the heat of the day to a place where there was never a fresh face to look upon the glory and marvel at the grandeur of her costume. And Sir Victor was winning for himself the reputation of a pagan—he had never been seen in The Chase pew since the day he came home a married man!

Such conduct was very reprehensible! his guardian told him so; his guardian's wife added that it was shocking, absolutely shocking! and his guardian's eldest daughter declared it to be a pity as he was in the country—of course if he were in town no one would know whether he went to church or not. "But in the country it's safest to do what's orthodox," she said. "They don't care what life you lead all the week, but they do like to see you go to your family pew on Sunday with a good big prayer-book in your hand." Mrs. Mitchell pronounced his conduct "that terrible that she'd rather not talk about it;" and even Lucille asked him once, earnestly, to go out of compliment to her! Only Charlie agreed with him in thinking it better that he should rather scandalize the Dempsters and Pigotts and others by remaining away, than disturb their calmly devotional frame of mind by standing up before them week after week to be commented upon, and looked at, and keenly marked to the neglect of the special duty they had come to perform. Only Charlie openly upheld his determination to remain away if it seemed good to him to do so. "Do you think seeing how

they're both watched and looked at would tend to make him feel particularly grateful, or humble, or charitable?" she asked; "and what would be the good of saying the empty words if his heart wasn't in them? I think he's quite right not to go and pander to idle curiosity; respectability is a great institution, but truth is better, and there would be something false in Victor going there to pray and praise under the circumstances."

Be that as it may, Victor would not go, and Claude Ogilvie and Lady Cleeve had walked down together, and together they occupied The Chase pew. The Baby's appearance in that place caused a mighty sensation! Conjectures as to and what he was were freely hazarded, and when Mrs. Dempster's Sarah, familiarly known as "my gal Sally," came in, she was received in an impressive manner by those who were fortunate enough to occupy benches near her, for she had a sister in service at The Chase. Sarah had an overheated and breathless aspect—evidently the result of hasty walking—and it was immediately and correctly adduced that she had been up to see this prized sister, and came back fraught with intelligence. She relieved herself of her tidings with such promptitude that Mr. Claude Ogilvie's name had gone the round of the congregation even up to the good little children who sat under the shadow of the pulpit before the litany was read.

Pretty Mrs. Selwyn James did not flee the edifice with her usual celerity on the conclusion of the service. She wanted The Chase people to pass out first in order that Claude might see her, and see that she didn't know that creature! She began to wish that he could have come to Baysford in some other capacity than as the guest of Lady Cleeve: with such a facility as he had for making love to his neighbours' wives such proximity might be dangerous and detrimental to her undivided way over his heart! She hated Lady Cleeve—hated and detested her more for her beauty than anything else! and this not because she sorrowed that so fair a thing should be marred by sin, but because it had gained her something very tangibly good despite that marring.

Like her mother, Mrs. Selwyn James would have been tolerant to a Magdalen in rags, but to a fellow-sinner in silks at six-and-sixpence a yard she could not be tolerant. Therefore she hated Lady Cleeve, and longed to show Claude Ogilvie that she sat in the seat of the scornful above his hostess, and "wouldn't know her!"

She got up, this practical young Christian, when Lady Cleeve and her cavalier were passing, and nodded to Claude Ogilvie, and made a little peremptory authoritative good-tempered gesture to him, indicating that he was to wait and speak to her. To her surprise he merely acknowledged it by a stiffly solemn salute; and when she recovered from that surprise a little and walked out, she saw him still attending on Lady Cleeve's footsteps, and evidently intending to escort her home. The fact was that the Baby had come down fraught with the determination of paying the most rigorous respect both publicly and privately to the wife of his host. So Alice was deprived of the little triumph she had promised herself of winning even young men to scorn Lady Cleeve if *she* Alice but gained the signal.

Another pair of eyes than Alice's had rested with eager enquiry on the fair handsome face of Lieutenant Claude Ogilvie. Miss Cleeve had at once decided that this was a card that might serve her. She read in the countenance of the young military Adonis, vanity, daring, and sensuality. She needed no Leporello to tell her that the conquest of hearts and honours had been the chief occupation of his life. The young fellow's unconcealed satisfaction with the rare animal beauty he possessed was a strong point. He was not one who would lightly regard the slackening of any chains that beauty had been instrumental in casting around any one—clearly he could ill bear to see that beauty slighted. Sir Victor had said that the Baby was not used to be undervalued. And now after this first sight of him Madge longed for an introduction, in order that she might play upon the knowledge she had gained from his friend and his face.

Mrs. Selwyn James sat out under the medlar tree in

the afternoon, reading her novel and heaping up bitter reproaches in her heart on the head of the recreant Claude for not coming to see her. And while she did so, the recreant Claude was sauntering about The Chase grounds with Sir Victor, and Sir Victor's wife was watching him with fierce loving eyes from the end of the conservatory, where she had her chair planted for that purpose.

To any other woman than his wife, the *personnel* of the young baronet would have seemed the better of the two. But love is blind, and what love had ever been hers to give she lavished on Claude Ogilvie. The young officer's features were as fine and his hands were whiter than his host's, and he had the art of managing his feet and legs with ease and grace after the manner of his profession. But Victor had this gift by nature, and though he was not taller he looked a grander man—he had more the air noble about him than Claude.

By-and-bye they went away from the range of her sight, and lit their cigars and stretched themselves on the turf under some sheltered boughs. And there, 'under the influence of the heat and narcotic, Claude expanded, and broached the subject of his difficulties to Sir Victor Cleeve

"I can't ask you to lend me the money—but if you'd lend me your name, old fellow, I'd take care that you were not troubled—for some time at least," he added candidly; for he saw that candour was a very sure thing to appeal to Victor. And the latter replied—

"Well, you shall have it if you'll make them engage to wait for another year, and not put me in the place of accounting for it to my guardian."

"Ah! your guardian—I thought I understood that he had quartered himself and his family upon you at The Chase?" Claude asked, delicately removing the cigar ash that had retained its fair proportions all the while, and throwing it on the ground. And then Sir Victor sprang up and fell to brushing the grass off his coat sleeves; and when he could not do that any longer, he pointed down the length of the avenue in which they had

stretched themselves, to the top of the chimney-pots of the Gate-house, and said—

“That’s where they are living now! would you like to go on and see them?”

“I’ve heard Conawy James speak of them—he was rather sweet on one of your cousins I fancy. Yes, by all means let us go down.”

Sir Victor walked along in silence for a minute or two and then he said—

“Which of them? Cursedly insolent of him to speak about either—but which was it?”

“I don’t know,” the Baby answered, looking at Sir Victor with the old laughing devil of easy, languid contempt in his eyes. And then he added, and his eyes altered as he said it—“but James is a cad—every fellow knows that; and so is his brother, a cursed one.”

It was ungrateful of Mr. Claude Ogilvie to say it, considering all things; but he had been playing at being in love with Selwyn James’s wife for some time, and he reflected consequently that it behoved him to despise and detest her husband.

The two girls were making lemonade in the kitchen when their cousin and his friend arrived. “Come in here at once, before you speak a word,” Charlie said through the open window; Papa’s asleep in the drawing-room, and mamma and baby are asleep in the dining-room, and Ann is gone to church, so this is the best place, because we can speak without being overheard.” And on that the two young men went in, and Claude Ogilvie was introduced to them.

“We drink too much cider, mamma says, Victor, so we thought we would redeem the time by making lemonade to-day: it’s not light work I assure you,” Charlie said.

“Can I help you, Miss Cleeve?” Claude Ogilvie asked; he was used to being waited upon and to having little delicate attentions paid to him by the unmarried daughters of the houses at which he visited—it was only to other men’s wives that he ever made himself useful—he asked Miss Cleeve “if he could help her” quite in joke.

Charlie just looked at him carelessly, as if estimating his capability.

"Well," she said, "I daresay you could if you tried; but as you've been playing with the dogs and I don't like a flavour of terrier in my lemonade, you must go and wash your hands first, and then you shall squeeze some lemons; this is the way, through this door, you'll find a sink with a tap over it and a running towel hanging up close to it."

"I don't think he'll care for that sort of thing, Charlie—it's a kind of little joke of which he'll miss the point," Victor said laughing, as Claude, very much to his own surprise, obeyed Miss Charlie's behest by going to wash his hands at the sink, preparatory to squeezing lemons' in her service.

"Perhaps not;" she replied, "has the remedy against a repetition in his own hands at least."

"Charlie's afraid of a repetition of the Tregoar business, Victor," Madge said, with a sweet spite that sisters are sometimes prone to indulge in.

"No, Charlie's not," the golden-haired Miss Cleeve commenced; but she could not say why she was afraid of Claude's visit, for at that moment he reappeared in the doorway that was between the kitchen and the scullery where the sink stood.

Charlie too had read something of Mr. Ogilvie's character in his face, and she deemed that the sooner he was well away from Baysford the better for all, herself included. She had calmed her heart considerably of late; to all outward seeming it was indeed but "a sister's quiet love" that it gave to Victor now. But she did not want to be put upon the rack of uncertainty as regarded him again.

She saw Mr. Claude Ogilvie was one of those men who cannot brook being displaced from the highest pedestal for another man to mount it even for an hour. So now, in a thousand trifling ways, she made Victor assume the more important and pleasing position—she made much of him, in fact, to his friend's abasement, for she had no

desire to see Claude become an instrument in Madge's hands for any of her ends.

"Isn't it a delight to you to be so well employed, Mr. Ogilvie?" she said at last; and he having just at the moment giving his knuckles a cruel rub against the grater with which he was preparing some lemon peel for the further flavouring of the lemonade, smiled grimly as he replied—

"In your service."

"How gratefully you tell what isn't quite the truth!" she said. "Victor would never hurt his fingers and say he liked it."

"I tell you what it is, Cleeve." Claude said to him when they were walking home to dinner, "that golden-haired girl and you are spoony on one another, that's a fact. Is that the reason they left The Chase?"

"I'd kick any man who said it was," Victor replied.

"Oh, I've no doubt whatever that you would, and quite right too. By the way, I must go down to the village to-morrow and call on Mrs. Selwyn James. I saw she was at your church this morning, and I know her slightly."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE RIVALS.

THE hours lagged more heavily still to pretty Alice James after seeing Claude Ogilvie in The Chase pew. She maintained a serene aspect during what remained of the Sabbath; but even then, had she dwelt in the Palace of Truth, it would have been discerned that she considered her father a tedious old bore, and her mother an affectionate but unmitigated nuisance. She sat out under the medlar tree again in the evening, hoping that he would come and repeat some of the soft speeches he had been wont to make under the auspices of the cockatoo and little monkeys in the Pantheon. She sat there till the dew fell and chilled her, and till her mother's incessant

raids upon her privacy sorely tried that serenity which has been commented upon. And at last she went in and sulked with her supper, and caused Mrs. Lisle much nervous anxiety respecting the health of her darling when she actually would refuse Devonshire cream. She pettishly refused all the little insinuating advances that were made towards her comfort, and utterly routed her father's bland, broad sympathy when he offered it to her. She could have cried with spite and dulness and ennui, and she did not dare to cry, because she felt that the cause of her tears if investigated would be dubbed (and was) reprehensible. His not coming to her to-day, when she had seen him and yearned for him, made her feel how fleeting a thing his fancy for her was—how light her hold was upon him—how soon they might drift apart, and be as nothing (or worse) to one another. She had neither a strong mind nor strong feelings, this poor young girl, who had been left to her own devices to her peril; but she was stirred through all her nature now at this straining, as she deemed it, of those chains of bondage which he had sworn were pleasant and light to him. As thousands of other women have said in thousands of similar and different cases, she murmured in her soul, "If he would only *come!*" She just thought that the sight of him would make the past pleasanter to look back upon, and the future easier to travel. The fact is, she wanted, as we all do, comfort for the "present;" it is this want and its realization which enables us to live.

Poor girl, she was weak and wicked, as are thousands of her sisters whom God has made, to err and repent, and sin and sorrow for it, and win through, by His almighty grace, to a better world than this! She was fraught with folly; and how many would be found so if pulled before the public and mercilessly analysed! I remind me of the text of my book, "Be lenient—be tolerant," and will refrain from saying more about Alice James's demeanour on that sabbath evening, when she maintained serenity by an effort, and go on at once to the Monday morning, when her prayer was granted, and Claude came.

She had risen on this morning refreshed in body and mind to the point of feeling sure that he would call upon her to-day, and dressing herself in a way that should make her look pleasant in his eyes when he did call. She was vain, intolerably vain of her personal appearance was pretty Alice James. And now, though there were far more beautiful women even in the narrow circumference of this little village of Baysford, she imagined that by the charm of her womanly beauty she might appeal to him again. She did not question herself as to the nature of the emotions she desired him to experience at sight of her, but she hoped he would experience some, and exhibit once again the old tenderness and purposeless devotion. She had brought her maid down with her, and here it may be recorded that the maid was far more troublesome to that simple household than the daughter of it, her mistress. And she held earnest counsel with her maid this morning as to which dress would be the most suitable and at the same time becoming. Mrs. Selwyn James stood rather in awe of this functionary's opinion, not because it was good in itself, but because it had previously been ventilated in the service of a departed knight's wife.

Leader, the maid, was as unpleasant as a poignantly aroused conscience this morning. It is one of the attributes of an unworthy confidence unworthily bestowed, that it is sure to rise up and deal blows at you when you are weakest and most defenceless. Leader was only human—only ignobly human, and her mistress was in her power in a measure; so when she was arranging Alice's locks to the best of her judgment for the further enslaving of Claude, she let out her claws and scratched Mrs. Selwyn James gently.

"Mr. Ogilvie haven't got so much to say as he had back in the summer, m'm, when it were a letter every day," she said with a small giggle.

"No," Alice replied, and she tried to be very calm and dignified, "he was thinking then of leaving his regiment, and he wanted Mr. James's interest, that is the reason he had so much to say then."

"And to save master trouble he wrote to you. Well, now, if I didn't think all along that you didn't want master to know about them letters; how pleased master'll be when he know that Mr. Claude is here to help pass your time away in this 'ole, for that's what it is, and no other word can tell 'ow I 'ate it," she proceeded with extreme volubility.

"I shall be leaving soon, very soon," Alice replied nervously; "and, Leader, you needn't mention anything about Mr. Ogilvie being here if you're writing to John; please don't, Leader," she continued, the fear of her husband rising up and rendering her abject before her own servant—"please don't, Leader, for Mr. James will think that I knew about it before I came, and I didn't; I only knew that he knew Sir Victor Cleeve.

"It aint *my* place, and no one knows it better, as my lady used to say, 'Leader,' she says, 'if ever you through no fault as a servant,' she says, 'give offence to another mistress, don't you have no fear I'll speak to how well you know your place, and I haint no fear, m'm, not a bit, for I know my lady's as good as her word; but as I was sayin', it aint my place to speak about the young gentleman coming here by comincerence, as one might call it, at the same time as yourself."

"I think if you altered that grey poplinette it would fit you, Leader," Mrs. James said tremulously as she was leaving the room; she began to feel that she was in bondage, and that this devoted maid of hers was quite ready to turn and slay her should a fitting opportunity offer.

But her fainting spirit revived itself over the breakfast table, and she grew temporarily gayer. Monday morning was a busy, not so much that as a fussy one at Baysford Rectory. The Sunday school teachers brought the cards to show the children's marks; and the washer-woman called with a curtsey and a smile, and the scripture-reader came to report on the religious state of feeling in an outlying hamlet that was also under Mr. Lisle's spiritual jurisdiction, and that was, as he was wont to express, "reeking, absolutely reeking with dissent." The inhabitants thereof were also poor creatures

reeking with rheumatism, which may have had something to do with their abstinence from a five mile walk to church; and so the state of their souls and bones was duly enlarged upon every Monday morning by the "chiel who had been among them taking notes" on the previous day. Besides these things Mr. Lisle had other less conspicuous, perhaps, but equally important to attend to. He had to take his yesterday's sermon out of its black leather cover and put it away on the top of the pile of MSS. that had accumulated during his twenty years' ministrations at Baysford; and he had to look out for a text for his next Sunday's discourse, and to inwardly digest the same; and to listen to the lame exposition of the meaning of the last Sabbath's gospel from the lips of the first class, who were specially honoured by an admission into his study for an hour on the second day of every week.

And Mrs. Lisle was equally full of occupation. Monday's dinner was always a heavy one at the Rectory to make up for the cold repast—offspring of consideration for the domestic—of the day before; and Mrs. Lisle was not a woman to order dinner rapidly and lightly; she gave thought to it, and time, and many words. Whether it should be boiled or roast, or made into a pie—a squab-pie when easy baking apples were procurable—was a question of grave import. Mrs. Lisle was one who not only believed in the eye and the hand, but in the tongue of the mistress, and on Monday morning she always gave the latter the more freely in a sort of half unconscious rewarding of herself for the serious silence imposed upon her the day before. Alice knew as she sat at the breakfast table that morning that she would be free to follow the bent of her own will for some hours to come, unimpeded by either her papa or mamma; and she was grateful for the boon of their temporary neglect for various reasons.

"I shall be in the kitchen till twelve, Alice, and then I'm going round the village; will you go with me?" Mrs. Lisle asked, when she was taking her departure for the scene of culinary action, with her cap-strings pinned

behind her head, and her sleeves rolled up over her elbows.

"Well, no, mamma; I think I'd rather keep quiet out in the garden, it's such a treat to me to be quiet, you know."

"Ah! you gay fashionable people like a change, to be sure," Mrs. Lisle replied, swelling with satisfaction at being the mother of this young woman, whom a London season had utterly prostrated, and consoling herself for any slight disappointment she might have experienced at not being able to secure the company of her married daughter in her parochial tour, by the reflection that she would be able to say the more about her.

So Mrs. Selwyn James went out in the pursuit of peace, and planted herself under the big old medlar tree with her novel; and as she sat there she remembered that but a year ago she had sat in the same place and indulged in an innocent girl's idle dreams of the future, without the faintest shadow of an idea as to the one who would share that future with her. And now the full idleness of those dreams came home to her, for she had a husband and a lover—and they were not identical.

That is to say, she had believed that he was her lover until yesterday, for he had told her that he loved her, and that she would have made the light of life to him if only he had known her before, and a great many other foolish things; and she had believed him, and sighed, and said it was sad, and they "must forget one another," never thinking how uncommonly easy it would be for Mr. Claude to forget her, and how uncommonly difficult for her to forget Mr. Claude.

Hours passed, and her novel could not hold her in the slightest degree any longer. The morning's arduous occupation over, her mother went out through the garden, nodding her a good-bye; and as she passed through the gate, Alice reproached herself for waiting for him who came not, instead of accompanying Mrs. Lisle. She pictured him uttering soft nothings with half-closed languid eyes to the beautiful woman up at The Chase who had won her first lover from his memories of her his first love! And as she pictured him thus she

hated Lady Cleeve worse than ever, and felt more intolerant than before to Lucille's vicious past and well-assured present.

And while she thus made her private moan at his keeping away, Claude was giving a trial tug at the chains that held him back. Sir Victor had casually alluded at breakfast to Claude's intention of calling upon Mrs. Selwyn James, and Lucille had thereupon telegraphed her desire with her eyes that she wished to speak to her guest.

After breakfast she went and sat in the conservatory again, from whence she could see everyone who crossed the bridge; and by-and-bye, when Claude sauntered out with that evident intention, she rose up and followed him out, and from the terrace called him to come back to her.

"Are you going for a walk down into the village?" she asked, and when he nodded assent she added—

"Are you going to the Gate-house?"

"No; I'm going to call on the wife of a man who's been very civil to me," he said. "Conway James's sister-in-law is here, and as I owe my recovery from rheumatic fever to the care and attention I received at Royston Hall, it's the least I can do to go and leave my paste-board upon Mrs. Selwyn James."

"Shall I go with you," she said, laughing; "her mother calls on me pertinaciously once during every month—shall I go and return it with you now?"

"If you owe Mrs. Selwyn James a call I shall be delighted to escort you," he said, bowing and speaking with the utmost gravity; "but will you be kind enough to get ready at once, for I don't want to defer going any longer?"

"No; I woult put you in the position of being the attendant of a woman who isn't wanted, Claude," she said, in a sorrowful tone. "I'll walk down as far as the Gate-house with you, and wait there while you go on to the Rectory."

"Go in and see the Miss Cleeves?" he interrogated.

"Yes," she answered, "we do that sometimes. They wouldn't stay in the house when I came, but we look in at each other occasionally—it isn't pleasant, but we do it, and I'll do it now."

They had walked on as she spoke, and were now crossing the bridge. When they came to the Gate-house she said, "I shall find my husband there most likely; shall I tell him to go on to the Rectory for you?"

"Just as you please," he replied; but though his answer was assenting and his tones *sauve*, the blood mounted to his face and his eyes flashed out angrily.

"It wouldn't please you that I did it," she said jeeringly. "Oh! Baby, don't I know you well! You're going down to flirt with that dumpling-faced girl, or you have been flirting with her and are going down to get out of it—which is it, Claude?"

"She's been a little goose, as many women have been before her, Lucille," he answered. The interest she betrayed in him reawakened some of his old interest in her, so he called her Lucille and disparaged Alice, two things that he felt sure would please her.

"Have you any heart, Claude Ogilvie?"

"I lost it when I knew you," he said, softly.

"And you must have lost your brains when you can utter such a hacknied idiotic speech as that," she said, impatiently. And then they slackened their footsteps, this pair who had fashioned and shattered a spell that still held its influence over the woman's heart; and as they slackened their footsteps they began to discourse something after the manner of old; and during that discourse, which lasted until they reached the Gate-house, Claude Ogilvie had made a clean breast of all Mrs. Selwyn James's weaknesses, and had sworn a fresh allegiance to the wife of Sir Victor Cleeve.

She could not endure to think of his offering vows and protestations, no matter how idle, at another woman's shrine.

"You will not stay with her long, Claude," she pleaded.

"No; I wont—only she'll be spiteful; and saying things about you, if I don't pay her common attention now," he replied; and then they came out by the Gate-house, and sailing along down the street they saw Mrs. Lisle.

At least he saw and recognised her at once as the lady who had been in the pew with Alice, and whom he had been told was Alice's mamma; and he hastened his steps at once, for the idea of seeing Alice alone, despite all he had been saying against her, was pleasant to him. Lady Cleeve did not observe Mrs. Lisle.

"Then you'll go in there," he said hurriedly, "and I'll come and call for you presently. I shall only just leave my card probably."

And Lucille replied, "very well," and went in at once through the Gate-house palings and knocked rather nervously at the door. For though she had spoken of these occasional visits lightly to Claude Ogilvie, as of things that had taken place, this was the first of the series, and she was not at all sure how it would be received. She only wanted him to see that she was not quite a Pariah and outcast.

The two girls were sitting in the lobby when she went in; it was idle hour at the Gate-House, this one of the mid-day heat, and they generally passed it in the cool lobby, talking. To-day Lady Cleeve came in in the midst of a brisk controversy on the subject of whether Madge's oath had been an utterly futile thing or not. Madge contended that still she had hopes—still it might be fulfilled—still something might occur that should enable her to keep it!

It was an inopportune moment for Lady Cleeve to make her first appearance there, but well-bred people are rarely awkward, and these two girls were that at least. They received her as if it were an everyday occurrence. And when she said, "I walked down to the village with Mr. Ogilvie, and when he asked me to wait for him till he came from a call he's gone to make on Mrs. James, I didn't care to let him know that we were not friendly;" they indicated a cool corner for her to recline in, and apologized for their mamma's absence, with a politeness that speedily set her at rest.

In the meantime, Claude Ogilvie was being put through every device his talent for such things had taught him to get away from Alice. He found her nearly

crying with hope deferred, and pettish and sulky to an extraordinary degree for so smilingly-visaged a woman. She reminded him of everything he had said, and looked, and meant, and upbraided him with a general falling away; and he felt himself bound to coax, and soothe, and flatter her. She wrung protestations from him and believed them, and gradually got good-humoured again; and when she had arrived at this stage she commenced questioning him about Lady Cleeve. "She will never be visited, you know!" she said; and he replied, "Oh! won't she?"

"No, of course not! Who would visit her, I should like to know? It's very disagreeable for me, for if she'd been a different kind of person it would have been some place for me to go and some one for me to speak to while I'm here. Of course The Chase is the only house in the village that I could visit at!"

"I thought you said just now you couldn't visit it?"

"Well, not now—of course not now; but under other circumstances it would be only natural that the Lisles and the Cleeves should be friendly, I think; indeed, the Lisles is the older baronetcy of the two;" and as Alice said this, she put her little nose up in the air with a contempt for everything that was younger than the Lisle baronetcy that was perfectly delicious to Claude Ogilvie, knowing, as he did, how the Lisles had scouted her claims of kin to them in town.

"There's the Gate-house," he remarked; "don't you know the Miss Cleeves?"

"Oh, yes, I know them; but unmarried girls are no companions for married women who have anything to think about. I was very young when I married, Claude, and I didn't know my own mind, I begin to fear. You see Mr. James does not belong to the same class."

Mrs. Selwyn James had no wish that he should make the seeking her presence an excuse for seeking the presence of the two beautiful girls at the Gate-house. Therefore she was determined not to cultivate any peculiar degree of intimacy with them now he had come; and he read this determination of hers and the fear that

had given it birth, and resolved to play upon both for his own amusement.

"I must go now," he said, after a little time. "Lady Cleeve is at the Gate-house, and I'm going to call for her." And then he just glanced round the lawn, and seeing no one, he tempered the severity of his last communication by raising her hand to his lips and kissing it.

"Oh, my young horstrich," thought Leader, who witnessed the operation from behind the curtains in her mistress's bed-room; "you ain't settled about leaving your regiment yet, it seems."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MAN AND DOG.

MISS CLEEVE was alone in the lobby when Claude Ogilvie went back to the Gate-house. "I fear I have tried Lady Cleeve's patience too severely," he said; "she has gone away without me."

"Well, not her patience so much as her prudence," Madge replied, carelessly. Victor came in and suggested that they might as well walk home together and have luncheon; and it isn't prudent, you know to make a hungry man wait. My sister is gone part of the way with them."

"Then I'd better follow them quickly, or they'll leave nothing for me. Cleeve's a good fellow, but when it comes to leaving the last bit of *paté* for his late friend, I don't know that he's to be trusted."

"I don't know that he is, even for such a friend as you've been," she answered, glancing up at him quickly. "Why you helped him to gain his wife, didn't you?"

He lifted his brows and shrugged his shoulders, not because this action was natural to him, but because he wanted to gain time before he answered this speech, that sounded far more like an assertion than an interrogation; and while he was gaining time the truth flashed upon him

that the girl had some special enmity to Lady Cleeve. And with the flash of this conviction came the resolve not to lower Lucille yet farther in the estimation of Miss Cleeve; for Claude Ogilvie had his better impulses—as have the most of us.

“I don’t know that I can claim any share in Cleeve’s choice—I mean any share in having brought him to make it. Every dramatically-disposed man in Aldershott had as much to do with it as I had. We military histrionics required a leading lady, and the present Lady Cleeve (of course you know she’s been an actress), came, saw, and conquered your cousin; and I don’t wonder at it,” he continued with a great air of frankness, “for she’s uncommonly handsome and uncommonly clever.”

“Her talents didn’t develope themselves during our very limited intercourse,” she said, briefly; and then she added more leisurely, “I can’t congratulate her on her descriptive power, at all events.”

“What did she attempt to describe?”

“Neither place nor incident,” she replied, laughing. “Lady Cleeve has evinced the most marvellous reticence with regard to the places she has been to, and the things she has seen.”

“Then it was a person. Tell me who it was.”

“Yourself.”

“And how did she fail?”

“How? Do you mean *why* did she fail? Through being temporarily dazzled by the good looks of her husband, I conclude. At any rate, she did fail miserably;” and then Madge tried a very broad and inartistic piece of flattery, and added, “I should not have said so much to the Claude Ogilvie she described.”

He felt indignant with Lady Cleeve and jealous of Sir Victor. He had been well able to endure that Lucille should marry his friend—but he could not calmly reflect on the possibility of her thinking his friend a better looking or more attractive man than himself. It was a very sharp pang to the young officer, who had been a beauty-man all his grown-up life, that the personal appearance of another should be deemed superior.

"Well, by Jove! I like that of Lucille," he said, in an annoyed tone of voice; "that's rather good, I think. Any fellow's an ass who cares a d—— (beg pardon, Miss Cleeve!) for his looks, but when a woman's told him over and over again——" He paused, remembering that he did not want to injure the woman who had adored him for his handsome face once, and Madge Cleeve said coolly—

"Told him what over and over again—that he was her *beau ideal*? because that's what she says of Victor."

"She's had a good many *beau ideals*, I fancy," he replied. "I mean most young ladies have, haven't they?—and she's been about a good deal, you know, and had to pretend it on the boards—that's all I meant, Miss Cleeve; and now I think I had better go up and have some luncheon."

"She's been pumping me for some purpose of her own," he thought, as he came out of the house and started off at a good pace for The Chase. He was not quite clear how far it would be possible for Lucille and himself to compromise one another by counter statements. But he deemed it well, since the family had taken her union with the baronet so much amiss, that as little as possible should be said now about the intimacy that had formerly existed between them. "It won't do her any good, and it may do me harm," he thought, "so I'll give her a hint as soon as possible;" and with that he walked briskly along, scarcely heeding where his feet fell and only anxious to get back to luncheon and Lucille.

The path he was pursuing had been, as has been stated, the chief avenue once—the principal entrance—the state approach. It was bordered by some of the finest trees in the grounds, and the spaces between these trees were thickly studded with evergreens of no puny proportions. There were fine laurels, and portly magnolias, and tulip trees, and great bushes of myrtle; and suddenly, while hastily brushing past these, a voice startled him by exclaiming harshly—

"You won't have a poor man up for trespassing, will you, master?"

"No, I won't, but I can't promise that you won't be had up all the same," Claude said, pausing to look down at the figure from whence the voice proceeded.

There was nothing picturesque—nothing at all that could appeal to the heart through the eye, in the garb which clothed this figure. It was simply the coarse, common corduroy suit of a very much out-of-luck son of toil; but in the face that surmounted the figure there was a dark, fierce, gipsy-like beauty, and the black eyes had the wild appealing look in them of a hunted animal.

"Thank you, young gentleman, for your promise," he said, speaking in a better tone—taking more trouble with his words apparently than he had done before; "if you ain't hard on a man it isn't likely any one else will be on this land. I'd get up and thank you, sir, but it's not easy standing in such boots as mine; and as he pointed to his feet, Claude glanced at them, and saw that the leather was worn away, and the bare bleeding flesh was visible in more than one place.

"Stay where you are, poor devil," he said, throwing him a shilling; "I'm not the owner of this place, but I know he isn't one to hunt a man out."

"That's what I am, a 'poor devil,'" the man replied, catching the shilling adroitly. "You are not Sir Victor Cleeve, aren't you?—Well, bless yer for a kind gentleman, whoever you be!" he added, resuming the harsh whine of mendicancy with which he had first spoken; and then he slunk back amongst the bushes out of reach of the sunbeams, and Claude pursued his path to the house.

Charlie had been induced to stay by Victor's persuasions and the conviction she had that her father would not be angry with anything that might be done to please Victor just now. For Mr. Drummond Cleeve was brought very low by reason of many unpleasant letters and reminders from London, and he meant to condescend to borrow money of his ward. So Charlie had made Victor happy by acceding to his request and staying there; and when the prolonged luncheon was over, Sir Victor proposed that some more old habits should be resumed, and that they should all go for a drive.

"I wish you would go, and take all the poor dogs for a run," Lucille said; "I can't, for my head aches awfully; but you might as well, Charlie."

Claude Ogilvie couldn't go either, for he had letters to write, so Charlie started in an open carriage alone, with Victor on the box driving.

"Can't we call for Madge?" she said, for she knew that some latent embers would be re-lit in Madge's breast when she came to know about it, and that Miss Cleeve would be direfully displeased.

"Well, I think not, Charlie," Victor said, deprecatingly. "You see if we call for Madge you'll be talking to her all the time, and not to me at all—and it isn't often you talk to me now, dear."

And Charlie only blushed in reply.

The dogs had all been unloosed from the yard. Sir Victor had established a large, if not remarkably select kennel. First, in point of size, was Hector, a solemn-faced Newfoundland, who was accredited by his master and the neighbourhood with all manner of good qualities, because he was a capital copy of Sir Edwin Landseer's magnificent "Member of the Humane Society." Then there was Tafra, a Scotch deer-hound; and Rose, a black retriever; and Prince, a brown Irish water-spaniel; and Folly, a lively white dog of no breed worth mentioning; and a brace of mild loveable setters, silky, soft, and lady-like in the extreme; and Spot, a mottled pointer; and Fuss, a Skye terrier; and last, and least of all in the estimation of every one save a stable boy to whose heart he was particularly dear, Bully, an atrociously ill-disposed and singularly perfect specimen of the bulldog tribe.

"We shall never keep them all together, I'm afraid," Victor said; "it's all I can do when I'm riding to keep that beast of a Rose from going off hunting."

"Oh, Victor, then she'll be no use in the season, and such a handsome dog as she is too," Charlie replied, sympathetically. "Hasn't she been broken?"

"Never broken properly; there, she's off; you must get out and come up on the box and hold the horses, while I get down and lick her; the other dogs are all right."

"I don't see Bully," Charlie said, as she obeyed him; and then Victor got down and collected his troop of dogs, and found that Bully was indeed missing.

"The fact is, we oughtn't to have brought so many," Victor said, in an annoyed tone; that Bully's such an ill-tempered devil to be loose on his own hook. I think I had better not lick Rose, or she'll be off too, and these are the dog-days."

"Bully has fallen in with Tom," Charlie said; "you know how fond he is of him."

"I hope with all my heart he has," Victor replied; "if the brute gets down into the village, and any small child ventures upon familiarities with him, Bully will take the run of his teeth on that child's person. I won't keep the brute any longer; I don't half like him myself."

Bully meanwhile was making the most of a somewhat rare liberty. He was a good specimen of his breed—white, with a flesh-coloured spot on his right side and over his right ear. His head was uncommonly fine—large, with a wrinkled, frowning forehead, and an ill-tempered, impatient nose. He was well made, with slender flanks, and firm, lean sides, and the muscles in his neck were of iron.

Bully had not elected, as has been seen, to go with the motley herd. Immediately on being loosed he had chivied a cat from the yard into the back kitchen. From thence he made his way into the dining-room, where he found the remains of the luncheon, and was found shortly after by a footman devouring said remains ravenously. He did not confine himself to harmless and mild viands; he partook of things that were flavoured with red pepper, and he growled horribly to himself as he fed. The weather was hot, and there was no water in the room at which he could get to cool his tongue. The bulldog's eyes began to glare when his hunger was appeased, and his tongue to loll out of his mouth. He was in a very bad temper—a temper that might easily be fanned into madness.

"Drat the dog—don't have him in 'ere," Mrs. Mitchell cried, when he finally ran into the drawing-room, where

Lady Cleeve, her mother, and Claude were sitting with open doors and windows; "he looks for all the world like a Whitechapel butcher's dog," she continued, and then Claude Ogilvie got up and whistled him out of the room into the garden.

Lady Cleeve rose and followed them. "Poor fellow!" she said, patting the bulldog; "he has a bad name, but I believe he means well, only he is very ugly."

"Don't pat him—he's ugly tempered," Claude said hastily; "if I were Cleeve I wouldn't keep such a dog about my place; they're such nasty customers to meet at night, for they've no scent, and in the dark they'd as soon tear their own master to pieces as any other man."

She gave a quick convulsive shudder, and her face paled beneath her rouge, and showed that the shudder was a reality.

"To be torn to pieces by that dog—it's horrid, too horrid; can't we take him and chain him up, Claude? I don't like to have him loose."

"Oh, he's all right now," Claude said; he had no very strong inclination to have his fingers damaged ever so slightly by Master Bully, and he thought that that would be the least done to the stranger within the gate who essayed to chain him up. So he changed the subject abruptly from the dog to his visit to Miss Cleeve; and in listening to what he had said, and in recounting in turn what she had said to the same young lady on previous occasions, they placed some distance between themselves and the house.

They sauntered about at the top of the avenue that led to the Gate-house for some time, till the sharp, clear, clanging trot of horses in the high road at some distance broke upon their ear.

"How well those horses step," Claude said, pausing to listen with a man's ready appreciation of what was good in the pace.

"They're the greys," Lucille replied; "they'll pass by at the bottom of the avenue. Shall we go down and make Victor drive us round?"

"You don't mind coming without your hat?" he

asked ; and she answered, " Oh no, not just to go through that end of the village," and set off at a run as she spoke in order to intercept the carriage at the gate.

The broad-chested, lean-flanked bull-dog, with the frowning, wrinkled forehead and the villainous eyes and the muscular bandy legs, went along at a waddling trot before them. Suddenly he stopped, then dashed in between a couple of evergreens, and then, all in a moment, there was a violent disturbance amongst the shrubs—a human yell that was partly cry and partly curse, a heavy blow and a snarling howl ; and then the white bull-dog and the man to whom Claude Ogilvie had thrown a shilling in the morning tumbled out together, in a struggling mass, almost at Lady Cleeve's feet.

The dog was proving the justness of his claim to thorough breeding. With the brutal ferocity of the purest of his race, he had flown straight at the man's face, to which he hung now with a hideous, silent tenacity, from which blows that fell with the weight of a sledge-hammer on his back, were powerless to dislodge him. Sometimes the dog was under and sometimes the man in the course of the unnatural struggle ; but the brute's hold was not for an instant weakened. If extraneous aid was not given there was no hope on earth for the baited man.

They had fallen out from the sheltering shrubs at Lady Cleeve's feet, and Lady Cleeve had given a little shriek of surprise, and caught up her dress and jumped back, more startled than horrified, for she did not realize what it was at first. But presently, scarcely a moment after, she was trying to command the dog away and Claude Ogilvie to the rescue, for she saw that a tramp—a human being, was being bitten to death by her dog ; she realized it all fully now.

And then, a minute after that, she saw something else, and she flung herself down by the side of the combatants and pressed her strong long white fingers closely round the bulldog's throat. And her groans and cries rang out more wildly than those of the man who was being mangled by a dog.

Those iron muscles never softened or relaxed under her pressure, fraught though it was with a terrible intensity. What woman's hands are strong enough to choke off a bull-dog when he means holding on? His mind is wax to receive an impression that he ought to cling to to the last—and marble to retain it.

She recognised her failure and got upon her feet again with the rapidity and lack of grace people do evince when they are in great haste and much excited. Lady Cleeve never waited to strike an attitude, or see whether her drapery had a graceful fall or not when she was in earnest. Had she carried this disregard of effect into her profession, she would have succeeded better on the stage.

The brutal contest continued still!

"Are you a man?—can you see it?" she cried, turning to Claude Ogilvie and catching his arm; and he, remembering that he was only a man, and therefore no match for a bull-dog, prayed her to be quiet and tried to coerce her into calm.

"Take that devil away if you would not see me die!" she shrieked; "take that devil off, Claude, Claude, or I'll curse you!" And then she wrung herself from his grasp again and flung herself down in one more unavailing attempt to conquer the dog, who was so silently, so cruelly, so fatally pursuing his dreadful work.

She had her arms—her strong white massive arms—round the bull-dog's neck! She had her beautiful face—that face that was so beautiful despite the degrading paint—down on the bull-dog's head, and in another moment she would have bitten off the dog and have saved the man at the peril of her own life. They were all three, man and woman and brute, amalgamated in a manner that was hideous to behold—and she was saying in a frenzied manner, "Oh! just God!" when there was a cry from another voice and a hasty step, and then Victor, the man she had deceived to his downfall and married to his disgrace, was by her side, kneeling on the bull-dog's throat—loosening his cruel fangs with hands that never faltered at the dire peril—conquering the brute force that had conquered humanity.

She never moved from the ground as her husband continued kneeling on the dog's throat, holding down the projecting under-jaw with hands that seemed made of iron. She was scarcely conscious of how long she remained there by the side of the tramp who had fainted. But when she rose to her feet bewildered and staggering, other help had arrived, and the bulldog was muzzled and securely double-chained and held between two men.

Sir Victor's hands were covered with blood, and he wiped them hastily, and searched eagerly and anxiously now the struggle was over for the faintest shadow of a scratch—and there was not one found. "Thank God!" he said fervently, with a great sigh of relief, "thank God—for the dog's mad." And when Lucille—Lady Cleeve—heard those words she fell down again on the turf that was spotted with the tramp's blood—fell down in a deathlike faint of horror.

It did not take long to enact this scene—about the same time that has been employed in describing it perhaps. Victor had come upon it thus opportunely in consequence of Claude Ogilvie's shouts—for Claude had shouted for help vigorously—and he who shouts vigorously for help for others in time of need is worthy of great praise. "Halloo! there's a row in the grounds," Victor had said to Charlie. And then he had pulled up at the entrance by the Gate house and listened. And when the appealing shout was repeated, Charlie said—

"You get off and run up—it may be Bully in mischief—and I'll take the horses round;" so he had obeyed her, and by the grace of God come up in time to strive to see, at all events.

Ms Charlie Cleeve drove the horses round rapidly, and caused by her solitary advent no small amazement in the yard.

"Where's Bully, Tom?" she asked of the stable-boy—and when he told her that he thought Bully was with master, he spoke of the shouts that they had heard, and sent off couple of men with Tom to the Gate-house avenue at once, and followed nervously herself, half fearful of what might have happened, and inwardly pity-

ing the handsome Baby very much if he were the victim of Bully's ferocity.

Claude Ogilvie and one of the grooms were endeavouring to revive the man who had been attacked, when Charlie arrived at the field of action. And Sir Victor was trying to assuage the terrible anxiety that beset his wife, who had just come out of her brief swoon. He was striving to interpose his own person between Lady Cleeve's eyes and the bulldog's victim.

"Let me see him—let me speak to him for God's mercy's sake," she was pleading; "let me, Victor—let me tell him that I would have given my own blood to save him, and that each time that devil's fangs went into his flesh they went into my heart."

"My poor Lucille," he said gently; "why should you reproach yourself? it was my cursed carelessness that let the dog loose—there's no blame can attach to any one but me."

She caught her husband's hand and kissed it passionately.

"O Victor, bless you; may God bless you for doing what you did—he will bless you for your goodness and courage, and—you *will* let me speak to that man?"

She was shuddering and trembling as she rested on Victor's arm, and as she urged her request she turned her head and looked on the bleeding, apparently inanimate form, and as she caught sight of it her jaw fell with a spasm of horror that was painful to witness.

"You can do him no good. I will have him well looked after. I'll do all I can, Lucille," Sir Victor replied. "Go back to the house with Charlie—here, Charlie, give her your arm and stay with her," he continued in a whisper as Lady Cleeve burst into a shower of tears.

"He's coming round," Claude Ogilvie called out; "get the women away for God's sake, Cleeve, and send for a doctor." And then with a nod of his head he directed Sir Victor's attention to the bulldog, who was striving frantically to free himself from the hold of the

two men who had chains to either side of his collar and were now standing off at their extreme length.

"Will you have him brought to the house, Victor?" Lady Cleeve asked. And when he told her "yes," she went off at once with Charlie, sobbing and trembling, but keenly anxious to get home now evidently.

"Tell the servants what has happened," she said, quickly, putting her hand on Charlie's arm as she paused for an instant at the drawing-room window; "and tell them to have every thing that may be wanted in readiness. "Oh! what am I saying?" she groaned. "Oh, Charlie Cleeve, what is wanted when a mad dog bites?"

"I'll see to things, and then I'll come to you," Charlie said, taking Lucille's hand firmly in her own. "Just think how much worse for us all it might have been. It's horrible of course, but it might have been a relation."

And then Lady Cleeve sobbed out that she would go and tell her mother and get her out of the way, and went in with steps that could not be firm through the drawing room window to the room where Mrs. Mitchell was calmly slumbering under the auspices of a brace of blue-bottle flies.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

DOOMED TO DESTRUCTION

"SEND for a vet. as well as a surgeon," Claude Ogilvie said when Lucille and Charlie walked away; "don't kill the dog, Cleeve, till you hear what state he's in, for he's a real good bred one." Claude was very sorry for the result, but he could not be blind to the truly admirable manner in which Bully had deported himself as a bulldog. He was only a man, and men are prone to these little weaknesses of liking to see an affair of the kind done properly, if done at all. "He never touched his arms or legs," he went on, all the while supporting the injured man's head with almost womanly tenderness;

"went straight for his throat and face, and hung on like a leech. It will be a pity to kill him."

"I'd kill twenty of the same sort rather than it should have happened," Victor replied.

"Well, you'd find some difficulty in getting the twenty like him to kill," Claude answered, getting up, and then the man who had been hurt opened his eyes and gasped for breath, and finally put his hand up to his throat to feel if the dog were still there.

He presented a horrible appearance even now that the livid look had left his face; flaps of flesh had been torn from his chin, which was covered with a thick newly sprouting beard, and they hung in strips over the upper portion of his throat which was lacerated to the degree of the muscles protruding through the gaping wounds. The iron-fanged dog had done his work in such a way that were he really mad, that man's shrift would be a short one.

He rolled over on his side as he came to consciousness, and after a minute or two he raised himself up on his elbow, and suffered his mutilated visage to droop towards the ground.

"So you've hell-hounds to hunt men down here, master, have yer?" he muttered feebly; "you've yer dawgs to track us out wherever us be." He gave a short laugh that ended in a sob that was painful, exceedingly painful to listen to. Sir Victor moved closer to him, and said—

"I'd rather the dog had fallen on myself, my good fellow;" and then he put his hand out and touched the hand that lay flaccid and helpless by the side of the man. "You don't think I'd have put him on you?" he asked.

The man opened his eyes and moved his head a little, to look into Sir Victor's face.

"Are you Sir Victor Cleeve?" he asked.

Sir Victor nodded.

"Was *you* with the woman who set the dog on me?"

"My God, she did nothing of the kind," Claude Ogilvie cried hotly, coming forward; "my poor fellow, you're mad! mad——"

"—Like enough," the man muttered, wiping away some of the blood the dog had drawn.

"You're mad to say or think it. I was with Lady Cleeve. Set the dog on!—why, she risked her own life in a way no other woman in the world would have done—no other woman would have had the pluck or the will," he continued, turning away impatiently and speaking in a lower tone, to risk her life for a poor devil who was paying the penalty of loafing and lurking."

"Was it *she* took the dog off?" the man asked, slowly scrambling upon his feet, and then when he stood and looked at them, they were all struck with the wild gipsy-like beauty of that portion of his face which remained intact.

No—but she tried to do it," Victor said, and as he said it the man's eyes softened strangely, and he leant against a tree and attempted to hide the emotion that had moved him to a weakness the pain had proved powerless to call forth. The maimed tramp—the baited man shed tears freely when he heard the lady had sought to save him.

The veterinary surgeon arrived before the one who was sent for to minister to the man. Bully had a great name in that neighbourhood; as a pup of six months he had won his earliest laurels by affixing himself to the nose of a bull, and remaining thereon till the bull dropped. He was immensely respected for many miles around Baysford, and the report that doubts as to his sanity had arisen, caused quite a sensation—a far greater sensation than the fact of his having bitten a man. "There ain't too many of 'em," the vet. cried, jumping into his gig the moment it was ready—scarcely five minutes from the time the messenger from The Chase entered the yard; "his mother was smaller, but she was the gamest little bitch that ever lived; and though Bully's father was only a terrier, she threw back, and Bully's the very picture of Sam that her first litter was by, and every inch of Sam was true bred. It's a pity he should be killed—there ain't too many on 'em!"

But when he came into the Chase yard and saw

Bully, he deprecated his fate no further. "Just you go and tell your master I want him," he said to Tom—and Tom read in the vet.'s eye that his favourite, the white bulldog, was doomed.

When Sir Victor came out, the veterinary surgeon went forward to meet him.

"A man has been bitten I hear, Sir Victor," he said in a low tone: "is he bitten where the flesh can be cut off or burnt away with caustic—has it been done already?"

"Nothing has been done—and the man is horribly lacerated about the face and throat."

"Then you'd better do with him what I am going to do with the dog, sir," the vet. said.

"What's that?" Sir Victor asked.

"Shoot him, sir—the dog's rabid. I've handled a good many queer ones, but he's the queerest I've ever seen." And then Sir Victor turned away to hurry off another messenger for the doctor, and the veterinary surgeon proceeded to the fulfilment of his task.

Lady Cleeve had gone to her mother and given her an outline sketch of the tragedy that had taken place while she had been sleeping the sleep of heat and dyspepsia. Mrs. Mitchell was not a hard-hearted woman by any means, and her daughter's evident anguish affected her a good deal.

"It's done and can't be undone; drat the dog, I didn't like his looks when he came in here just now, lolling his tongue out of his mouth and shoving his underjaw out like a dripping-pan; but I've objected to them ways before and been told 'twas all his breed. But there now, Lucy, if there's anything to be done for the poor man, to which I can't be too grateful for taking that dog's bites from all of us, that your servants don't care to do, I'll do it willing."

"Mother—don't go near him; promise me you won't. I won't suffer it."

"Why not, child?"

"Oh! because he's horrible to look upon, and the sight of him would drive you mad. I'll nurse him my-

self if he wants nursing. I can't see worse than I have seen."

"If I can do anything I'll do it willing," Mrs. Mitchell repeated emphatically. And then Charlie came into the room and told them that the poor man was being brought to the house now between Claude Ogilvie and a stable-helper, and that the cook had warranted an unlimited supply of hot water to wash away the tainted blood.

There was great confusion in the house for upwards of an hour, and at the end of that time Drummond Cleeve and Madge came up in a terrible state of mind. For a report had made its way down into the village that a bull had gored Miss Charlie, and that in the course of Bully and Lady Cleeve's efforts to save the young lady the dog had accidentally bitten the mistress of The Chase, who at the moment of narration was being smothered under a feather-bed.

"I've never approved of the dog, never!" Mr. Drummond Cleeve said when he had heard the facts of the case. "I'm very glad that he's killed before he's done more mischief."

Lady Cleeve looked up at him with eyes that resembled the gipsy-like tramp's in their mournfulness and depth.

"You don't know what mischief he has done, Mr. Cleeve."

"We will do all we can for the man," he said; "but I must say that I think the warning, though severe, will be a good thing—it will keep other vagrants off."

"Ah!" she said, "you'll never know what I feel. You didn't see it, you didn't see the dog's eyes looking into the *vagrant's*; you didn't hear the sound of his horrid teeth tearing through the flesh of the man who, who——"

"Lucille!" her husband interrupted, "it has been too much for you; one would think, my poor girl, that you had had a hand in bringing that catastrophe about."

"And so I had," she cried; and then she added more quietly, "for I took the dog out, you know—at least he was with me."

The Rectory received the tidings later in the day—a slightly altered and improved version was delivered there.

“That ill-looking dog with the big head has bitten one of Sir Victor’s friends, I hear,” Mr. Lisle said to his wife and daughter, coming hastily into the room where they were sitting, to get his hat. “I’ll go up to The Chase and hear if I can be of any service.”

Alice sat pale and trembling and unable to speak for a minute. Then she said—

“Is it Mr. Ogilvie?”

“The young man who was at church yesterday? Oh! no—I understand he choked the dog off with considerable risk to himself.”

“How noble of him!” Alice exclaimed; “how like Claude!”

“Oh, very nice—very nice and kind-hearted of him, I’m sure,” Mrs. Lisle said cordially. And then her curiosity asserted itself and put all her scruples of propriety out of court.

“And I think, my dear, it’s *my* duty to go up with you—there’s no knowing, as you say, what may be wanted, and I only feel it right to go.”

Alice thought for a moment or two after her mother had ceased speaking. In turf parlance the odds were in favour of a dead heat between confusion and chaos up at The Chase—there would be nothing derogatory, only something delicately attentive, in going up with her father and mother, and if an uninterrupted chat with Claude Ogilvie did ensue, no one could say anything about it.

“I think it would be only civil of me to go with you, mamma; when people are in distress every consideration save that of assisting them if possible should be waived.”

Alice had always had a *penchant* for missions of mercy it may be remembered.

The doctor had been and was gone again by the time the Lisles reached The Chase. He had dressed the wounds, and done all that medical skill could do. As I am utterly ignorant of the course pursued by the faculty

when mad dogs bite, I will refrain from describing it. He looked very grave when he came out from the room where the tramp had been laid, but he said little, and the weight on the hearts of all were such that none cared to question him.

"I have other patients to visit now, Sir Victor," he said. "I will come again about ten, and bring a man with me who has had more experience in such cases than I have had myself, I'm happy to say. I'll bring Mr. Radford—he's had the casualty ward in ——— Hospital for ten years."

When the Lisles came, the story of how it happened was narrated for the fiftieth time by Claude for their benefit. And under cover of the excitement created by the recital Lady Cleeve stole quietly out of the room.

Charlie turned to her father and Mrs. Selwyn James and the tears came into her eyes as she said—

"Lady Cleeve has a tenderer heart than any one of us ; we're agitated because we are excited, but she feels for that man truly and deeply."

"Perhaps it was the sight of the blood made her feel sick," Mrs. Selwyn James suggested. Pretty Alice did not like the idea of Lady Cleeve being accredited with the possession of great tenderness and kindly feeling. She believed Lady Cleeve to be capable of dancing a hornpipe on a corpse, or spiking young infants, or committing any other enormity. So now she derided Charlie's appreciation of Lucille's quick sympathy, and suggested that it was not that, but sickness which she felt.

And while they spoke about her, she made her way hurriedly to the door of the room where the injured man had been placed. She turned the handle very quietly and beckoned to Tom, who had been left on guard, to come to her. "Oh, Tom," she said, when the stable boy had tramped across the room thrice as noisily as he would have done had he not striven so severely to be sylphlike in his step. "Oh, Tom—tell me how he is—the poor man that our horrid dog——"

The poor man opened his eyes at the sound of her

voice, and Tom assured her that he was nicely—"quiet as a lamb."

"You may go down Tom," the mistress of the mansion said, coming into the room, "and in half-an-hour bring up another jug of hot water—and before you bring it you can go and tell Sir Victor that I came and sent you away, for that I was so anxious I wished to see for myself how he was going on—and ask Sir Victor to come here."

The boy pulled a lock of hair and went away, and when he was safely out of the room and the door was securely closed, she turned, and for the first time looked at the man upon the bed.

Their eyes met, and remained stedfastly fixed for full a minute. Then she put her hands up before her face with a little smothered cry, and went forward and dropped on her knees by the side of the bed and brought her head close to his bandaged face.

"Damn it—don't kiss me!" he began; and she interrupted him—"don't curse me! don't curse me!"

"Do you deserve a blessing from me?" he asked, savagely. "I'm hid from—I'm left to starve or rob, whichever I can, while you're my lady—and when I come to see yer grandeur and just turn in to rest my bleeding feet, I'm bit by yer dogs—do you deserve a blessing?"

"No," she said, "but I'm not so bad as you think. I sent you money—I'd have sent you more if I could have got it. But Blackman took money and jewels that would have made a couple of hundred at least. Have you spent all that?"

"You sent it by Blackman?" he asked, raising himself up. "By the good Lord above us I'll have his heart's blood for the black lies he has told me. *He* was hand in glove with you he said—*he* was a gentleman, who'd never done no black work that you was afraid of coming up and shadring over *you*—*he* was all this, he was; and he gave me a dirty pound and your address, that's all, and went away in a cab with gloves on his

hands. And you *had* sent me money?—You hadn't cast me over altogether?"

She got up and stood by him.

"Did you hear me tell that boy to send my husband to send Sir Victor Cleeve here in an half-an-hour?" she asked.

"Yes, Lucy."

"And when he comes I'll tell him all; who I am, and who you are—I'll keep nothing back—and God help us all!"

"Turn your eyes on mine and swear, swear that you sent me money—that you didn't sit down here and think of me left to starve and say to yourself, 'I won't help him.'"

"I swear it!"

"What money have you about you now?"

"In my pocket, eighteen or nineteen shillings; in my desk, six pounds."

"Get me the swag, all you have, and send more to No. —, Drury Lane, when you can get hold on it? And now I'll forgive you, Lucy, and don't you tell Sir Victor Cleeve any more than you've told him already. I don't want to harm you now I know the truth; but I came down, I'll tell you that, to see you and split on you."

"I'll be ruled by you, now," she said, sadly; "I'll tell or not tell just as you like. I'd give my own life to undo what has been done to-day, so you may think that I wouldn't stop at anything else to serve you."

He put his hand out to her now, and his wild dark eyes softened into a smile.

"Poor lass! poor lass!" he said. "Is your mother here?"

"Yes," she said; "I wouldn't let her see you yet; she doesn't know who the accident happened to; but she shall come directly I've told Sir Victor."

"No, she shan't," he said, gruffly, "I don't want to see her; I only came to see you, and she'd blab."

"She would, most surely; but it may as well be told now as then," Lucille said.

"But it shan't be told at all; I'll be off from here as soon as I can stir, and I'll never trouble you again provided you're up to your word, and never let me want."

She staid talking to him until Sir Victor Cleeve came at the end of the half-hour, and then—there was nothing told.

"I couldn't rest, Victor," she said, "I was so anxious; but he seems better now, and we may leave him with Tom, I think." And then she went back to the drawing-room with her husband, and every one of the party there assembled save Charlie thought her visit to the room of suffering a little bit of theatrical display.

But her kindness and consideration, and the *reality* of the sorrow she felt, gained her a great name in the village. She went to his room, they said, and offered to attend on him herself; and none but a real lady would have done these things. Old Mr. Lisle declared her conduct to be very praiseworthy—very praiseworthy, indeed. And Mrs. Lisle set her lips as firmly as nature would allow, and said, "Ah, well, charity covereth a multitude of sins," and looked the while as if she deemed that the mantle would be stretched to its utmost in Lady Cleeve's case.

Alice was very charitable on this occasion also. After a brief whispered colloquy with Claude Ogilvie, she turned to Mr. Lisle and said, "It will be well to keep the house quiet, you know papa. Hadn't we better ask Mr. Ogilvie to come back and dine with us."

And Mr. Lisle was highly gratified by this exhibition of Alice's forethought and consideration, and delighted to accede to her proposition. And the Baby thought it better on the whole—as the house was quite upset, you know—that he should go.

So The Chase was gradually cleared of its unaccustomed visitants, and Sir Victor and Lady Cleeve were left alone again to wait for the doctors, who were to come at ten. And by-and-by night fell, and darkness was over the face of the earth, and Tom, whose heart was sore for Bully, got wofully tired of the watch he had been told to keep.

Lady Cleeve was quite worn out about nine, and retired

to her own room to seek the repose she so evidently needed; and Sir Victor remained below, waiting for the doctors, and thinking of many things—amongst others, how pointedly Charlie called attention to all that was best in Lucille on all occasions, and how lenient she was to Lady Cleeve, though her own line of life had been so different.

“Though it’s ‘because’ of that difference,” he thought; “she has had no temptation herself, and still she won’t sit in judgment on the one who has had it, as the other women do.” And then he thought of Madge’s great, and Alice’s little air of scorn for his wife, and his heart grew more tender than ever to the golden-haired girl who scorned her not.

The two surgeons were punctual to the hour named, and Sir Victor Cleeve, dreading their verdict, but painfully anxious to hear it, went with them to the room where the wounded tramp had been placed.

The window was wide open when they entered—that was nothing, the season was hot, and that the window should be open was a natural thing; but the bed was vacant, and that was something, for the late occupant thereof had been bitten by a mad dog.

There was an immediate alarm raised, and presently Tom appeared, looking meek and frightened. “I only left ‘un at nine, sir,” he said, “or it might be a little arter, and then he was sleeping like a tope.” (Tom adhered, it will be perceived, to the original form of simile, and rejected the meaningless modern innovation of “top.”)

A slip of paper was found on the chest of drawers neatly affixed to the cloth with a pin, and on it were inscribed these words—

“Honoured sir,—My bites feels better, so as I don’t like fissick and have a job of work waiting me in London, I’m off before I sees you again.”

“We had better wash our hands of the business, Sir Victor,” Mr. Radford said; “there was no madness in the veins that throbbed in the hand that wrote that, at any rate; it would have been an unpleasant thing for you

to have a case of hydrophobia in your house, had it come to that."

"Hadn't I better put it into the hands of the police?"

"Take a man in charge for walking away from your house without bidding you farewell—no, decidedly not, decidedly not!" And then they inquired for "her ladyship," and finding "her ladyship" had gone to rest, very much fatigued with the events of the day, they left Baysford Chase to its repose and drove away again.

Lady Cleeve betrayed much surprise when she heard of the man's abrupt departure.

"Poor fellow! I hope no harm will come to him," Sir Victor said; "but it looks uncommonly like madness to rush off in that way, I think."

"Good God! don't say that, Victor," she said, shuddering; "oh! if we could live this day over again—the bulldog should get at him through me."

The excess of feeling created by the late event decreased gradually, and in a few days Baysford had almost forgotten the bulldog's exploit. It had something else to talk about—Lady Cleeve's intense sympathy with the attacked man had been looked at from the best point of view during the earlier hours of excitement. But now the excitement was over, and Lady Cleeve's sympathy with the wounded man was looked at from the same point of view with all her other actions, *i.e.*, the worst.

"I *do* hear," Mrs. Lisle said, going into her daughter's room one night after the latter had come in very much tired from an incessant perambulation of three hours about the garden with Claude Ogilvie; I *do* hear that Lady Cleeve sent the boy who was set to watch him away when she went in to speak to the man—and if *that* doesn't look like knowing him before—well! I don't know what does!"

"Who could he have been, mamma? There's something *shocking* about that woman, I'm sure—something dreadfully shocking—she looks like it; besides, who *ever* heard of any one respectable coming into a family in such a way?"

"No one never did, of course; it's all of a piece—all

of a piece. Mrs. Dempster was saying just now—she's been here about some cream that *she* says Jane fetched, and I say, 'Well, Mrs. Dempster, she may, but never by my orders—never.' I said so to Mrs. Dempster, for if servants are trusted when special orders have been given that they shall not be—in consequence of the many deceptions practised about eggs and cream—I *will* not be responsible, and so Mrs. Dempster knows." And then Mrs. Lisle paused to recall why Mrs. Dempster had been introduced into the conversation, and after a moment's reflection, with a brief "Oh!" of acknowledgment to her own powers of memory, she dashed off again.

"Mrs. Dempster was saying just now that one of the grooms who was on the spot, and saw it all with his own eyes, says, 'It isn't *my* place to speak, but the dog would never have bit the man if my lady had not flung herself into his arms.' Well, now, that looks bad, you know."

"Oh, looks very bad indeed," Alice responded; "but no more than I expected. I shall never dare to tell Selwyn that I've been up to The Chase; he's so very particular."

"And quite right too. I'm sure I've never regretted my own conduct through life, and I was always most particular—*most* particular. I'm not so young as I have been, of course; but even now I blush, I actually *blush*, when your father, with a pig-headedness, *ah! a—* I can't say how I despise it—makes me go and be civil to that woman."

"I really wonder at papa," Alice said, virtuously.

"Wonder at him! I should think you do, my dear. It's disreputable. And that man isn't all; that young officer is philandering after her in a most disgraceful way."

"Now that I *don't* believe," Alice said, warmly
"Claude is the very soul of honour."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

MADGE'S REPENTANCE COMES TOO LATE.

THE fictitious excitement of good feeling suddenly aroused was over, and Baysford was itself again—free to think calmly, and put the worst construction on whatever Lady Cleeve did or had done. The man for whom she had shown such warm sympathy—the man for whom she had derogated from her dignity to the extent of fainting when he had been pronounced in danger from a mad dog's bite—was an alien and a stranger. Had he been a son of the soil that had owned the Cleeve sway for generations, it would have been only right and proper that she, as the lady of the land, should have depicted deep dismay; but as it was, "it looked strange," people said, "very strange indeed," and they hoped the best and thought the worst in the most rigorously correct manner.

And while they said hard things of her, the woman of whom they were said went on her way with a face so sad that it might have ameliorated the judgment of the hardest—that is to say, the best—of her censors. The brightly handsome Baby had said, some months before, that she was "awfully old" to be the wife of the young baronet whom, between them, they had tricked into an alliance that was a source of more woe than joy to all. But now—since the day Bully had made a raid upon pungent viands, and gone mad through doing so—she had lost what remained of her youth—its brightness, fire, and force.

Lucretia, or Caesar's wife, might have been melted by the true terrible sorrow that dwelt in those haunting eyes of hers now. She got pale to a degree that even her rouge could not conceal, and the silver threads in her hair shone brightly, if by chance she forgot to apply the walnut pomade, and she had a worn, watchful look, and there was a general air of lassitude about her that would have wrought on the pity of the neighbourhood for miles around, had her antecedents not been "so very questionable." As it was they were inexorable, and in their

frequent conversations about her, they said her sin was "finding her out," and were good enough to find "the hand of Heaven" in each grey hair and additional wrinkle. It is marvellous how glibly Scriptural quotations flow from the lips when the faults of a fellow-creature have to be put into a set form of words.

About this time Drummond Cleeve's creditors were finding him out, however it might be, about his sins. He was leading a very harassed life, and his family shared its delights largely with him. A couple of bailiffs were lurking about the vicinity armed with instructions and power to convey him, when caught, to town. And Drummond Cleeve was compelled to cease from his diurnal stroll, and to barricade his front door, and to adopt other precautions which were disagreeable and degrading, and subversive of all domestic peace.

His debts were very large, for he had given bills on his heirship for any number of years; and now that his heirship had been proved nought, and his means nil, confounding Israel was wroth, and wanted its pound of flesh without further delay; and Mr. Drummond Cleeve had no the pound on his own person, and was sorely put about to find the friend who would give it. It was not a pleasant thing for those that dwelt in the tents with him at this epoch. He reproached his wife with his marriage and son, and Madge with her unfulfilled oath and Charlie with her refusal of Tregear, and Victor with countless sins of omission and commission and himself with nothing at all, in the freest manner possible and though he succeeded in keeping out of his enemies' clutches, he did not preserve himself perfectly intact. People handled his name roughly, and said hard things of him—even people who owed a good deal of money themselves. It is ill work baffling the bailiffs in a country village—every one sees how it is done; sleight of hand, if too clearly outlined, is not respected.

His sins were very clearly outlined, and people said very harsh things about him. It is always easy to do this, and sounds rather well than otherwise, for listeners are apt to indulge in the fond belief that the cas-

tigating rod is applied to the sin instead of the sinner. So Drummond Cleeve's career was declared to have been one of profligate infamy, and the punishment of the father's sins was held to have come upon the children when Miss Charlie Cleeve was seen scaling the back-garden wall because she wanted to go into the village, and they dared not open the door.

And while the Miss Cleeves were in durance vile, and Lucille was wasting under the influence of some secret sorrow, the spotless young matron who disdained her was skating on very thin ice. Mrs. Selwyn James saw a good deal of Claude Ogilvie in these days; to the best of her limited ability she was rendering Baysford very pleasant to the young officer. She saw a good deal of him—not openly and honestly at her father's house, but in a sentimentally surreptitious manner that was infinitely degrading. Mrs. Lisle, who lashed Lady Cleeve on all occasions, had no thought, poor woman, of the likelihood of her own daughter lapsing. She believed that Alice's prolonged diurnal strolls were taken at or a love for autumn flowers and the soft sweet autumn air—not out of a weak desire to bask in the burning sun of Claude Ogilvie's admiration—real or professed—and to listen to his remarks, which fell upon her ears with a more dulcet sound than all the notes of the wild birds. Alice was more agreeable than Lucille to him at his juncture; for Lucille had a fearful sorrow in her heart, of which he knew nothing; whereas Alice confided a great number of imaginary, as well as real griefs to his sympathetic ear.

And all the while Selwyn James was shooting guse with a calm mind, under the influence of the firnath he had in the profitable dulness his wife was enring with her mother.

At last, when August was drawing to its clo Mr. Claude Ogilvie announced his intention of going way; and when his intention was carried out, Leadeooked anxiously and in vain for symptoms of chagrin her mistress's face, and found none. Alice bore hiepar-ture and the consequent increase of dulness w what

her maid deemed hypocritical composure, and as soon as it occurred to her that it was hypocritical, her maid set herself to baffle it.

Post-official arrangements at Baysford were conducted in a primitive manner—that is to say, if you went and tapped at the window, the pane, that opened like a door, would be unfastened, and if you liked to take charge of them, Mrs. Clemence would give the epistolary communications for the whole village into your hands.

A few days after Claude Ogilvie's departure, Madge and Charlie Cleeve took advantage of a temporary relaxation of vigilance on the part of the bailiffs to get out for a walk. As they were passing the post-office they tapped and asked, "Were there any letters for any one?" Mrs. Clemence handed them by way of reply—one for Lady Cleeve and one for Mrs. Selwyn James.

They were given into Charlie's hand, and she was turning away with them, when Alice James herself, with her fair face very much flushed, and rather out of breath from hasty walking came up.

"The post is just in. Are there any letters for me?" she asked, and Charlie gave the letter to her, but in so doing, dropped Lady Cleeve's, which Madge immediately picked up.

Mrs. Selwyn James, on receipt of her letter, said goodbye to them, and went away with a hurried agitation, that was a new thing in the manner of the once placid girl.

"It was from her husband, I suppose, that she was expecting to hear?" Madge said to her sister. "What haste she was in to get rid of us."

"As I don't scan the direction of other people's letters with a view to finding out who they're from, I can't even guess," Charlie replied.

And Madge blushed slightly, for she was conscious that her sister had just observed her doing the thing she reprehended to the letter that was addressed to Lady Cleeve.

"We may as well walk up to The Chase, and deliver

this effusion at once, as we have charged ourselves with it," Miss Cleeve said, presently.

And Charlie told her that "if it bored her to walk up with the letter, she (Charlie) would go by herself."

"No, no; we may as well have the walk together," Madge replied.

And then they turned into The Chase grounds, and walked up the avenue where the bulldog had found and fought with the lurking tramp.

Miss Cleeve had seen that the writing on this letter was a man's writing, and being always on the watch for fresh links in the chain of evidence against Lucille, she resolved upon giving it into Lady Cleeve's hand with her own, and watching her keenly the while. And Charlie, when they were midway on the walk to the house, read something of this resolve, and attempted to baffle it.

"There will be no occasion to go in, Madge," she said; "we will go up and leave it at the door. I don't think it will be well to stay out longer."

"Very well; we'll see about it," Madge replied. But when they neared the house, Miss Cleeve caught a glimpse of Lucille's dress by the open drawing-room window, and so, instead of ringing at the door, she ran across to her ladyship, and defeated her sister.

"We've brought you a letter, Lady Cleeve," she said; and then she handed it to her; and while Lady Cleeve was eagerly perusing it, Madge went on—

"And if you want to answer it by this day's post, we will wait and take your letter, for we're going back straight."

Lady Cleeve did not answer for a minute or two—not till she had read the communication, which seemed but a brief one, and steadied her lips, which had grown white almost as she read. Then she said—

"Thank you; but I was going out, so I may as well take it to the post myself." And then she looked up, and saw Madge watching her and marking her anxiety, and she said—

"If you send to London for anything, thinking you'll get it extra good, there's always some fuss and mistake

made, isn't there? Tradespeople *are* so stupid. If you'll excuse me, I'll just go and write a line, and save this post."

Lady Cleeve got up from her seat by the window, and went back into the room to a writing table.

"Those must be very earnest directions that's she's giving her tradespeople," Madge thought, as she watched the trembling nervous force with which Lady Cleeve dashed off a few words, and the eager haste she displayed in folding and sealing her epistle.

"Now I'll get my hat and walk down to the village with you," she said, rising, and putting the letter she had received in her pocket, and keeping the letter she had written in her hand. Miss Cleeve noticed that Lucille did these things, although she appeared carelessly negligent of her movements. But when Lady Cleeve was out of the room, Madge raised her head and looked towards the writing-table—

"You're nearer to it than I am, Charlie," she said "but isn't that my blotting-book?"

"Oh! yes, it is. I didn't know you left it here."

"I forgot to take it in the hurry of going, and I've never remembered to ask Victor for it since. I'll ask Lady Cleeve to give it to me when she comes back, because I had caricatured many of my friends on various portions of it; and the nature of the blotting-paper has caricatured them even more than I intended, so I should like to have it in my own possession again."

"Nonsense, Madge! you can get another for sixpence."

"Another would be minus those works of art, I tell you, Charlie; we're old friends, that blotting-book and I; I haven't written a letter in comfort since I left it," Madge replied laughing lightly. But though she laughed lightly she was keenly anxious for the moment to come when she should have that blotting-book in her hands.

She asked for it as soon as Lady Cleeve re-entered the room, and Lady Cleeve handed it to her without a shadow of hesitation. "And now we'll go down at once, if you please," she said, "for I want to catch this post,

and I know it goes out about four." So they all walked away together—Madge with what she trusted might prove to be a mute witness against Lady Cleeve under her arm.

When Lucille had posted her letter, her genuine agitation decreased in a measure, and she presently assumed a little air of vexation and uncertainty. "It's so provoking," she said, looking at her watch; "it's too late to write another note, for Mrs. Clemence has made up the bags; but now I've forgotten something. The fact is, I am having some rather expensive dresses made, so expensive that I think it would be well worth while to go up and see about them myself rather than have them spoilt. I think I will go to-morrow and stay for three or four days." And then she looked at Madge and added—"You see old habits are strong upon me; I haven't got over being anxious to have my dresses suit well at first, for at one time I couldn't afford to have them altered."

"I see old habits are strong upon you," Madge replied, coldly. "However, if you've employed a good London milliner your dresses will be all right, I should imagine; it would be rather absurd to travel up to town from Devonshire about the trimmings on a dress *alone*."

"Absurd as it may be, I shall probably do it," Lady Cleeve said, flushing slightly. And then they reached the Gate-house, and she stopped and held her hand out to say "good-bye" to them.

They often—both of those girls—thought of her in after days, as she looked at that moment of bidding them farewell. Her large dark eyes looked out from under the shading brim of her hat straight into each of theirs in turn, and seemed, so Charlie thought, to plead for a kinder judgment than had been hitherto awarded. Her flash, her fire, the brilliancy of her beauty were gone; she was strangely softened and subdued, altered and saddened. "Good-bye, Lucille," Charlie said, heartily. "Going to town for a few days might do you good; I think this air does not agree with you." And Charlie pressed the hand of the desolate-looking woman very

kindly as she said it. And when Lady Cleeve walked away, Charlie stood watching her with pitying eyes.

"What an *intrigante* that woman is!" Madge said, almost as soon as she was out of hearing. "Quick with the tale and ready with the lie to an extraordinary degree."

"How do you know?"

"Even your charity must have perceived the fabrication to-day, Charlie; it was too glaring; of course she'll go and get the dresses now, and confute me and triumph. But if you're fool enough to believe that the letter we took her was from a milliner, I am not—it was from some man."

"We are not called upon to judge her, Madge. How unhappy she looks; unhappy enough to soften any one's heart, I should think."

"Not enough to soften mine, Charlie." And then they went in and heard that Sir Victor had been down, offering his guardian the wherewithal to come to terms with his creditors.

"And I've accepted his offer," Drummond Cleeve said. "It will slightly hamper the property for some years to come; but as he very properly observes, 'anything is better than the present state of things.'"

"For us, but not for him, papa," Charlie said, warmly. "You must not underrate such magnificent generosity—such rare kindness as Victor's. Oh! papa, *dear*, don't take it all for granted, and don't be angry with me, for I'm delighted that your annoyances should be over; but Victor is one in a thousand."

"You're just like your poor mother, my dear," Drummond Cleeve said, looking at his youngest daughter with aggrieved eyes. "No one ever conferred a favour, no matter how slight, upon me, that she did not immediately attempt to destroy my satisfaction in it. You're just like her—just like her."

"But this is not slight, dear papa, and the only reason I want you not to think it so is, that you may use your influence with Madge, and persuade her not to be always looking out for weak places, that we can never strengthen

unhappily. *You* know what I mean, and so does she. And, oh! Madge," the girl continued, passionately, "you can't grieve at the trouble and sorrow and disgrace it brought on him more than I do; but we can't undo the work, so why seek for flaws in it. Repay his unexampled generosity to us by believing the best of him and his, and things in general."

"You're a very foolish romantic girl, my dear," her father said. And as there was nothing to which Charlie so much objected as being called romantic, she ceased from her pleading, and went away, leaving Madge alone with her father and her blotting book.

Miss Cleeve turned the earlier pages of the blotting-book over hurriedly. So many characters had been pressed by these leaves, that one was not distinguishable from another. But when she came to the leaves that had been unused and fair when she left *The Chase*, she passed them with more searching eyes and a slower hand. And presently she paused altogether, and gazed earnestly at some full, strongly-marked inverted letters and sentences that were clearly imprinted on an otherwise spotless page.

I should never arrive at any one's secrets through the medium of his or her blotting-book, but Madge Cleeve was fully capable of perpetrating even this meanness. She gave herself up to the study for a long time, and when she rose from it, though some of the words baffled her, she had made out quite enough to compass Lady Cleeve's destruction. The first few lines of the note had been scrawled hastily and lightly, and the ink had partially dried upon them before they had been pressed on the blotting-book. But the date, the 30th day of August, and these words—

"Do not doubt me, I will come to the address you gave me to-morrow," were clearly discernible. And when Miss Cleeve had read them she paused in uncertainty as to what her next steps should be.

Once before her procrastination and lack of power to decide whether she should obey the dictates of honour, and forward Victor's letter to Charlie, had wrought dire

evil. The temptation was upon her now again to keep this secret that she had surprised, until after Lady Cleeve had put her design of quitting Baysford for "the address that had been given her" into execution. But her better angel triumphed, and she rushed up with her discovery into Charlie's room.

"I have been mad, I think," she said, bursting into tears. "I have prayed for something of this sort—prayed that she might stumble, and I might denounce her. Oh! my God! I've been a greater sinner than than woman."

"Still there is time," Charlie said, springing up. "Oh, Madge, thank God that you are yourself, my own dear sister, again; let us go up to The Chase, and speak to her kindly, and pray her to pause and think, and not to destroy herself here and hereafter. Let us go and be *kind* to her, Madge, and if we find we cannot save her, then, and then only let us ask her husband to do it."

They put on their hats and went out, and away up the avenue hastily.

"We shall find them at dinner," Charlie said. "Look, there goes the six-up train."

"Perhaps, after all, you had better go on alone, Charlie," Madge said; "she likes you better than she does me. Don't tell her that I know anything about it; say it's from yourself, it will be less painful to her."

Charlie's heart swelled. "Dear Madge," she said, "perhaps you are right." And so Madge went home humbled and contrite, and remorseful for that the evil she had prayed for had so nearly come. And Charlie went on to speak to Lady Cleeve.

"If they're at dinner I'll go and wait in the drawing-room," she said to the servant who opened the door to her. And the man replied that they were not at dinner.

"My lady has gone off quite sudden by train, leaving a note for master, who wasn't in yet."

CHAPTER XL.

A BRAND PLUCKED FROM THE BURNING.

CAPTAIN CONWAY JAMES had often thought of the invitation Drummond Cleeve had given him when parting with him at the Aldershot railway station. But he had never quite made up his mind whether it would be well to accept it as good. There are many things to be thought of before a young man, who is acknowledged to be a good *parti*, accepts an invitation to a house where there are beautiful portionless daughters. Madge Cleeve had made an impression on Captain James's heart, but she had not made the impression on his mind that she would be a good and fitting wife for him. In his heart he did not think that his brother's marriage with the cousin of a baronet had been such a success as to warrant his running "a precisely similar risk." That was how he worded it to himself at first; but afterwards he came to think that, with regard to Madge Cleeve, the case would not be so precisely similar. "Alice Lisle hadn't much beside that relationship to stand upon," he said to himself one night; "Miss Cleeve is clever enough to hide any pride she may have in it."

He had been entertaining a select party that night at his rooms in Duke-street; and now the excitement was over, the guests were gone, and he was treading his "banquet-halls deserted," alone. The inanity of bachelorhood—of a life alone in the busy world—came home to him. His friends were gone, and he felt dull because his conversational powers were as fresh as ever, and he had no one by to listen to him.

He had collected a motley throng together that night—motley, but pleasant. He had had men around him with whom he could talk either "shop" or art, as the whim seized him; clever guests, who had brought out their host, and enabled him to talk of the things about which he talked best. The man who can instance his own walls when delivering an impromptu essay on Etty's rare co-

louring, Mulready's delicate manipulation, Rothwell's tenderness, and Millais' truth, is sure to be popular with artists. He has—or, at the very least, he affects—a taste for the things they love; and this taste is a wonderful bond of good-fellowship between the man who has money to spend and the man who has pictures to sell. This may be a trade view to take of sympathy, but even limited experience teaches me that it is a very true one.

But when his guests were gone, and Conway James sat alone in his well-adorned rooms, it did occur to him that a wife such as Madge Cleeve would be, was not an unworthy shrine on which to offer up himself and his Lares and Penates. She was beautiful, and well-born, and well-bred—afflicted with a girlish *penchant* for her cousin; but that would wear itself out, or had maybe already worn itself out. "I can't accuse myself of having acted on impulse, however it turns out," he thought; "for when a fellow gets spooney on a girl in December, and doesn't follow up his fancy till the August following, no one can say he hasn't given himself time for reflection; but the fact is, I can't forget her." So he very wisely decided upon going down to Baysford on the following day (he arrived at this resolution on the night of the 30th of August), and quartering himself upon the Lisles, if Drummond Cleeve's present manner did not endorse his invitation of the past.

"My brother's wife is there," he said to himself, "and that will be a fair excuse enough for any fellow to go down, even to West Barbary."

So he had his portmanteau packed and prepared to start by an early train the following morning; determined to go down and see whether the girl he had been unable to forget was in reality the one woman in the world for him.

His intention had been to start by an early train, but one thing and another prevented his putting it into execution till late in the day. Before he left he had a letter from his brother Selwyn, containing a graphic account of

the sport he was enjoying, and a gracious invitation for Conway to go and join him.

"I shall remain here a fortnight longer," Selwyn James wrote, "and then come up to town and give you a look—go down to Baysford, to pick up my wife—and then back to Royston Hall, where I hope to find plenty of birds, and you ready to bag them with me."

He answered this letter with a statement of his intentions—of some of them, at least. He refrained, for instance, from all mention of Madge Cleeve; but he said he was going to buy a hunter, since Selwyn had decided on keeping the grey, and that he was going to get a pointer, and "to have a look at Baysford, where perhaps you'll find me at the end of the fortnight, if they treat me well," he wrote. And when he had written this letter he went down to some livery-stable hunting-grounds at Kensington; and when he had tried and settled on a horse, and looked at a dog, the day was wearing on, and it was time to get to the Great Western.

The August moon was shedding her silvery beams over the fair white city, and the tall tree-tops and the railway porters, and puffing, panting, exhausted steam-engine and passengers, when the train stopped at Bath, and Conway James jumped out on the platform to procure himself some pale ale. And as he was walking along to the refreshment-room, an up-train arrived and disgorged its passengers; and amongst them he recognized the dark beauty and the glowing, haunting eyes of her who had been the star of the drama at Aldershatt—of Lucille, Lady Cleeve.

She hurried in before him without a recognition, and he heard her ask for a cup of coffee, and saw her swallow it hastily. She looked miserably unhappy, he thought, though the eyes with which he looked at her were far from kind. Her pale cheeks and cavernous eyes only called from him the mental remark that she had forgotten her paint-pot and bella-donna. "What a hag she is in the flesh," he thought. "To think that any fellow should have been such an ass as that young Cleeve!" And then the whistle sounded, and he was compelled to

cast reflections on another man's folly to the winds, and rush back to save his train. He had no time to marvel on the strangeness of Lady Cleeve being alone until he was being whirled along towards Devonshire, and then he made up for it by casting about for every possible solution of the mystery of her husband not having been with her.

It was late in the night when he reached Baysford, and then he resolved upon not disturbing the quiet people at the Parsonage, who must have been in bed for hours.

"I'll just put up at the inn," he thought, "and go in to the Rectory to breakfast; and then get Alice to go and call on the Cleeves with me." So he asked his way at the station, and through the directions given him found his way to the inn; and as he was walking thither he passed the Rectory, and was surprised to see at that hour of the night a light burning and a figure flitting to and fro on one of the bedroom blinds.

Conway James gave directions about being called early in the morning, and then went to bed, and tossed about restlessly, disturbed by the vain endeavour to fathom the meaning of that light and flitting figure. He had come down to Baysford on rather an important mission, as concerned himself; but he was an affectionate, unselfish man, and the importance of his own affairs dwindled away to nothing as he thought of the possibility of his brother's young wife being ill, and his brother away in Scotland the while. "I wish I had gone in at once," he said to himself; and yet, perhaps, it's better that I did not; if there is anything the matter, they would only have been alarmed; and if there is nothing, they would have wished me anywhere. I dare say it's all right." But though he said this he could not think it; for he had often heard Alice speak of the importance that was attached to early hours, and an undisturbed night's rest, at Baysford Rectory. And he was up by dawn the following morning, with difficulty curbing the inclination which prompted him to be off to inquire for the well-being of his brother's bride at once. Different

habits and interests had a good deal divided these brothers, but the younger had never for an hour been estranged in reality from his old fraternal loyalty; for all their seeming indifference, there was a good sound foundation of thorough good feeling and affection.

He was ushered directly into the room where Mr. and Mrs. Lisle and Mrs. Selwyn James sat at breakfast, when he reached the Rectory. Mr. Lisle was elaborately consulting a Bradshaw through a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles. Mrs. Lisle was pouring out coffee, and smiling through some large round tears, that sat upon her cheeks like dew on a cabbage-rose; and Alice was in her bonnet and travelling dress, looking unmistakably pale and dejected.

"How is this, Alice? Are you going away?" he asked, when the first greetings were over.

And Alice tried to reply to him, but finding her lips refused their office, she took refuge in a scalding cup of coffee, "Which," she presently explained, "always made her nervous, and caused the tears to come into her eyes."

"Why," Mrs. Lisle said, taking upon herself the task of elucidation with her customary good-will, "Alice had a letter from her husband last night, telling her to meet him in town to-day; so she was going off at once. And I say, Captain James, that she ought to take Leader with her; but as she is coming back here, she wont do it. Now, what do you say?"

Conway James looked at his sister-in-law, and though he had a pang shoot through his heart, for that his brother's honour should be in such keeping, he pitied her.

"What do I say?" he replied. "Well, I say, Mrs. Lisle, that before Alice goes, she had better come out into the garden with me, and just look at a letter I have had from Selwyn, containing a change of plan. I hope she'll find it isn't necessary to leave Baysford yet," he continued, placing his hand on his sister-in-law's arm, to lead her from the room, "for I want her to stay now I've come."

And then Selwyn James's brother and wife went

away out into the garden where Selwyn James had once reprobated his brother's friendship for his young wife, and striven to put an end to it. And Mrs. Lisle was left indignantly to declaim on the subject of Conway James's freedom with Alice, which she was sure, "though he might mean well, Alice had much too proper views to like."

When Conway James got her out into the garden, he gave her her husband's letter to himself to read, without a word. And when she had read it, she returned it to him, without a word or look, and continued to pace by his side with a burning face and trembling steps.

"It is strange that he should have written to me to invite me to join him there the very same day that he wrote to you to tell you to meet him in town," he said.

And Alice constrained herself strongly to answer, and succeeded in saying, "Very strange, indeed!"

"What day shall you come back?" he asked.

And her voice sank very low indeed as she said, "I hardly know."

"Alice," he said to her, very gently, "I wont ask you to show me Selwyn's letter—a husband's letter to his wife should be held sacred; but I'll act as your brother should do, and not leave you, dear, till I see you with your husband. I'll take you up to town, Alice, since you are to meet Selwyn there to-day."

She looked at him with a frightened, wild, appealing look; and then the tears overflowed her eyes, and coursed down her innocent, peachy-looking cheeks.

"Now you are cruel, Conway. Oh! how *ever* could you treat me so?" she exclaimed, piteously; and then the tears flowed faster, and he suffered her to indulge in a very passionate burst of weeping undisturbed.

"My poor child," he said to her at last, "Heaven knows—and when you've time to think you'll know it, too—that I mean no cruelty. Don't be angry, and harden your heart against me, Alice, my dear sister, but thank Heaven for making me the instrument of your salvation from some *folly* about which you felt compelled to be secret. You will not go to town to-day, or

any day, until your husband sends for you in reality. I won't ask you anything, Alice, but before Heaven I charge you, if you are worthy to be his wife, remain so still."

And when Alice gave him a solemn, sobbing assurance, that such worthiness was hers still; that she had been weak only, not wicked, he believed her, and comforted her, but at the same time told her in unvarnished terms where such weakness was inevitably leading her.

He threw no halo of sickly romance over the species of fault to which Alice had shown an inclination—viz., that of "loving not wisely, but too well." "Don't believe in the sickly sentimentality which tells you that the woman who breaks every bond of honour weaves a chain of corresponding strength round the man for whom she breaks them. I speak as a man, and I tell you that it is only contemptuous pity for the thing proven so horribly weak which induces a man to keep up the semblance of affection for the woman who has assisted in blighting her own fame and his. I don't think you know what you were going to do to-day, Alice; if I thought you one whit less ignorant than I do of the nature of the evil you were braving, of the fire you've been playing with, by Heaven! I would not screen you from my brother's just wrath and revenge."

And Alice, thoroughly broken, humbled, and repentant, wept, and promised, and was genuinely remorseful.

There was an uncomfortable air of constraint over the inhabitants of the Rectory that day. Alice left the task of explanation to her brother-in-law, and retired to her room with a headache; and Mrs. Lisle elected to be rather offended at Mr. Selwyn James confiding the government of his wife's movements to "that young man," his brother.

CHAPTER XLI.

A TELEGRAM.

SIR VICTOR CLEVE did not come home till late on that August evening. He had been out riding at a distance of some miles from home, when he had met a horse-dealer, and the horse-dealer had made honourable mention of a colt of rare promise, of which he was the proud possessor, and whose beauties and excellences he desired to display to Sir Victor, being sure that he (the colt) was the very bit of horseflesh that would be dear to his (Sir Victor's) heart. And Sir Victor had listened to the voice of the charmer, and consented to putting several more miles between himself and The Chase, for the purpose of viewing the colt's performances. And the sight of them detained him a long time, for the colt was good as his owner's description of him, and was, therefore, the cause of a warm debate—Sir Victor desiring to become his purchaser at fifty guineas, and the dealer standing out for sixty, because of his shoulders having come up in a manner that was truly marvellous at his early age, and for other cogent reasons that may not be enlarged upon here.

"After all, I don't want him. I've more horses in my stable now than I know what to do with," Sir Victor said at last, getting on to his horse as he spoke, and preparing to leave the yard. And then the man told him that "the colt would be an ornament to any gentleman's stables, he would. Once get that coat off, and rid hisself of the shanney way he had of not knowing what to do with his 'ed when he felt the bit; and with your weight sir, on that there colt sir, where wouldn't you be in the field, sir? for by the time the hounds meet he'll be such a horse as not one in the neighbourhood can come nigh."

"Well, you may send him over to-morrow, and I'll try him again," Sir Victor said; "but I'm not likely to take him, I tell you that—not at all likely to take him."

"Oh, aint you?" the man said to himself, as the young baronet rode out of the yard. "You mayn't know it yourself, but you mean buying."

Trying a new horse is as seductive a pastime to most men as trying on new bonnets or very original things in headdresses is to women. If they possess more horses already than their means justify, they have a virtuous sense of self-denying satisfaction if they refrain from buying the new and tempting mount; and if the temptation is too strong for them, and they succumb to it, and order the animal to be sent them for "further trial"—which means, the dealer observed, buying—they have a feeling of guilty pleasure, which is, perhaps, more agreeable than the one of calm consciousness of doing what they ought to have done.

"By Jove! it's seven o'clock," Victor said to himself, as the market-place clock of the town where the dealer dwelt tolled out the hour. "I'm too late for dinner, however I ride. I may as well spare you, old Rowley, and go in to tea at the Gate-house," he continued, patting his horse's neck.

Rowley was well inclined to be spared, for the roads of the beautiful West are far from pleasant to horses' hoofs after the shortest droughts. What had been a muddy morass but the other day, when a slight shower fell, was now an equally trying admixture of soft, white dust and desperately destructive stones. Added to these drawbacks to speed, flies and gnats abounded, and cockchafers, that settled now and again with a buzzing whirr in Rowley's mane, were many. Altogether, the horse was very well inclined to be spared on that sultry August evening.

The shades of evening were over the earth before he reached Baysford, and pulled up at the Gate-house. The lobby door was open, and so after fastening Rowley up to the rails, by passing the thong of his hunting-whip through the bridle, and tying it, he went in, and shouted as soon as he got inside the door, to know whether they'd give a benighted man, who had lost his dinner, a cup of tea or not.

His two cousins came forward from the little drawing-room to meet him; and his first glance at their faces showed him that there was something amiss.

"Is there anything the matter?" he asked, eagerly. "Say Charlie—isn't all right here?"

"Yes—here," Charlie answered, hesitatingly; and then she looked at Madge to assist her in an explanation that must be painful to all. And Madge responded by coming forward and making it bravely, and briefly, and kindly and quickly—not at all like one would have thought the girl, who had desired that some such explanation might be needed, would have made it.

He bit his lip till the blood came as he listened, and his face grew flushed and passionate.

"A pleasant thing for a man to come home and hear!" he said, after a minute. "I suppose you think it serves me well right, don't you?" And then he sat down in one of the settees that Madge had covered with chintz, and buried his face in his hands. He reminded Charlie of how he had looked that night in May when he came home after his taking the truth to his heart at the Exeter flower-show.

"Don't sit down under it, Victor," Madge said, gently putting her hand on his shoulder.

And he looked up almost fiercely, and asked—"Did she think he would do so if he had any alternative, any clue, any trace of where the woman who bore his name had stolen away?"

"But you have!" she cried, eagerly; "I forgot that I can make out an address; and then she fetched her blotting-book, and showed him where the envelope his wife had directed that afternoon had been blotted; and he made out that it was No. —, Drury Lane.

"There is only one thing for you to do, Victor, and that is —"

"To follow her at once," he interrupted. "God only knows to *what*—but I must follow her at once."

"You are too late for the Linford eight o'clock train," Charlie said. And then she remembered that the servant up at The Chase had told her that his mistress

had left a letter for master. "And so you had better, being too late for the trains anyhow till ten, go up and read it, and then come back here, and wait till it's time to go; you'll be happier with us than alone, dear Victor; you won't think the worst if you've some one to speak to."

It was hard for him not to think the worst, considering all things, when he read the letter his wife had left for him.

"She had been hastily summoned to town," she said, "to see a sick friend—a girl, who might die before she reached her, and who prayed her to come at once. My movements are of so little importance," she wrote, "that though I told your cousins that I should probably go up to town, I did not tell them the reason why; nor have I told my mother, who would most likely have made a fuss, and detained me. I need scarcely beg you to feel no anxiety on my account. I cannot flatter myself that you would do so under any circumstances, and these would not warrant it, as I shall be home in a few days."

Truly there was little in the letter to reassure the husband from whose home she had fled.

It was a miserable evening that they spent at the Gatehouse, until it was time for Victor to go down to the station. They none of them liked the woman who was gone: but now, despite the strange manner of her departure—despite all the disgrace that might accrue to the name through her—they pitied more than they blamed her. The expression of her eyes—their wild, sad, sorrowful earnestness—as she looked at them when bidding them farewell that very afternoon, kept on coming back to them, pleading, as it seemed, for a kind memory.

"Good-bye, Victor," Charlie said, when he was going, "may it all be well—and you be back to-morrow."

"And your wife with you," Madge added; "for I, who've liked her least, Victor, think there's truth in that letter; and other people, if she stays away long, wont be ready to believe it."

Lady Cleeve's departure from the Baysford station

alone, and apparently in deep distress of mind, had caused much amazement, and given rise to much surmising as "to what was up now?" But Victor managed to assuage the rising storm of popular curiosity by allowing it to be understood that his wife had left a request for him to go up and join her, as she had been summoned away on business before his return.

And so the Baysford Cerberus was appeased by the small sop, and no one in the village save the two sisters passed an anxious time of it on Lady Cleeve's account.

Many times, though, during that August night did the moon look in upon Madge Cleeve, starting up with a dread that she had, and then uttering a fervent thanksgiving for that she had not been instrumental in this woman's downfall, if it was to take place. She was frightened—she shrank in horror from the thought now of having the worldly ruin of a fellow-creature—a sister woman—on her soul. She shrank aghast at the idea of what her own life would have been had she done aught or left undone aught that could have tended to this end, that might be direful. For months her heart had been hard as adamant against this woman, and she had been powerless to wreak a particle of vengeance upon her. And now she thanked the God of mercy for softening her heart at the very moment that such power was given her, as it seemed.

They made as light mention of the occurrence and their fears about it to their father and mother, as was possible; for so Victor had wished, until he knew "how things really were," he said. And even to one another they said little about it, for they scarcely liked to word their fears; they scarcely knew what they feared, or hoped, or wished, in fact. Let the end be what it would, it could not be pleasant—it could not make everything bright and smooth for Victor. And so, though they pitied the woman who had bidden them farewell with such mournful pleading eyes, they did not know what to wish with respect to her, or how rightly to estimate the best or worst that might befall her.

There was a slight diversion given to the current of

their thoughts in the afternoon. Mrs. Selwyn James came down to see them, accompanied by her brother-in-law, the handsome young officer who had been the means of getting Victor to Aldershott. Pretty Alice James had not by any means recovered from her headache—she was very pale, and subdued, and gentle. Her pallor and depression became her well, despite its being the result of indisposition. She was strangely tolerant, too, they both thought, for she abstained from saying anything ill-natured even when she alluded to Lady Cleve's sudden journey to town, the news of which had of course found its way to the Rectory during the day.

Captain Conway James had performed his part up at the Rectory with the deft skill that is born of fine generosity and kindness. When Alice exhibited contrition for her contemplated step, and weepingly promised to abandon it, and abjectly entreated him to help her and not say a word to Selwyn, he judged her truly, and knew that these feelings were genuine; and the former, out of which the evil might have been wrought, were false. And so he resolved, for the sake of his brother, to spare this easily bent reed the ordeal of censure.

"If there's anything said, and Selwyn hears it and scolds me, I shall go mad!" she said, opening her eyes very wide, to indicate the approach of madness and impress him with the necessity there was for him to save her from such scolding. And he told her—

"Oh! there's no fear of your going mad, Alice; and I'll see that there's nothing said to Selwyn about your frustrated journey. You foolish child! to think of trying your poor little wings in the world alone. What would you have done in London by yourself, eh?"

And Alice blushed and trembled, and said she "did not know—oh, Conway!"

Conway stopped all questioning on the topic by telling Mrs. Lisle that he had had another letter from his brother, giving later directions, by which Alice was to abide.

"And as Selwyn doesn't care to hear his altered plans and his bad ones talked about, you had better not say

anything about it when you see him, Mrs. Lisle," he added; "for he's one of the people who don't care to hear their own errors of judgment descanted upon."

And Mrs. Lisle's cap-strings quivered at the caution; and she remarked in reply to it, that "really, as the mother of Mrs. Selwyn James, she might be allowed to speak about her own daughter, she supposed."

To which protest Conway replied by saying—

"Oh! by all means, say what you like, my dear madam; only I wouldn't say it to Selwyn if I were in your place, for he never goes a second time where he has been annoyed once."

Which confirmed Mrs. Lisle's preconceived opinion as to her son-in-law's ill-temper and general overbearing disposition. "And this one will be like him, for all his laughing looks," she said to herself, angrily. "One would think they were crowned kings, to hear them talk of how careful we must be of how we look at or speak to them. I've no patience, that's what I haven't with them!"

But Alice was profoundly grateful to Conway for his having taken the terrible onus of explanation off her hands; and so she made, in gratitude, little humble-minded efforts to please this brother-in-law, who had proved such a good friend to her in time of need—a better friend than she would be able fully to realize until she was older and wiser. And after the name of the Cleeves had been uttered by and before him, she deemed that a visit to the Gate-house would be pleasanter than anything else in Baysford to him.

Captain Conway James had no reason to regret having partially believed in the invitation, which had been the offspring of gratitude. It is rather a rash thing to take a journey of some hundreds of miles for the purpose of testing the truth of a politeness which has been offered you on the spur of the moment, while the gratitude of the one to whom you have but just done a favour, perhaps, is a young thing and a true. But in this case the rashness was well rewarded. Drummond Cleeve welcomed the man whom he had asked five months

before to his house, as freshly and gracefully as if he had but asked him yesterday; and Madge—the beautiful Miss Cleeve—was cordial and kind, although altered and saddened from the brilliantly beautiful girl who had waltzed him into the feverish weakness of making himself partially responsible for a boy “sentimental enough to allow himself to be led by a designing woman into a life-long scrape.” But though she was altered and saddened, she seemed glad to see him; and as his hopes were not very high, as soon as he found himself in her presence, even her small display of gladness was intensely gratifying to him.

They spent the remainder of the afternoon, those four, in walking about The Chase grounds, and showing Captain James the scene of the encounter between the man and the bulldog; and when Claude Ogilvie's name was mentioned in the course of the narrative, Conway James marked the blushes that dyed his sister's face. And now he felt more strongly than before that it behoved him to guard her to the best of his ability until his brother came: for it was through him that the handsome Baby became known to the inhabitants of Royston Hall. And to himself, he called the Claude, of whom the Miss Cleeves were making such favourable mention now, “a false-hearted cur,” for his vicious perfidy.

Then they went back and sat in the spacious lobby, and had brown barley bread and clotted cream and sparkling cider for supper.

“We've got into the regular country ways of dining early and having a supper after our evening stroll in the summer, Captain James,” Charlie said. “For three days after we settled at the Gate-house we tried to be fine, and make believe that it was lunch when people came at one o'clock—and they made believe to think it was, too, which was more profound hypocrisy still; but we soon gave it up, for the same people sometimes came again at teatime, and that was awkward, you know—our Devonshire teas ain't light and airy things that can be explained away into kettledrum—so, when we

were found out, we became honest; and we find it answers just as well."

The entertained were happy enough; but the entertainers grew sadly distraught as the hours went on, and no messenger came from The Chase to announce to them the return of the master and mistress. They found that their powers of doing the honours of their father's house were failing them under the influence of the anxiety they were feeling on Victor's account. What agonies of shame and sorrow he might be suffering now, poor boy, while they sat attempting to talk and laugh lightly, and as if they had no hidden cares!

At last, Alice, who was in reality worn out with the excitement she had undergone and been obliged to repress, rose to go, and was inwardly blessed for the act by her young hostesses. They had come to this stage now, when what had been a pleasant diversion before becomes an unmitigated bore, and that they felt the gentle Alice to be now.

"Thank goodness, they're gone," Charlie said, as soon as the Jameses were out of the house; "I've hardly known what to say to them for the last hour—can't think why people won't see when they're not wanted."

"It would not say much for our good breeding if they had seen it," Madge replied; "besides, they haven't been very tedious, considering all things; and in her heart, as she said it, she thought that Conway James had been the reverse of tedious. But before she could give voice to this thought there came a sharp ring at the bell, and then a telegraphic message for Drummond Claire Cleeve, Esq., was brought in.

And when this telegraphic message was read, there was terrible confusion at the Gate-house.

CHAPTER XLII.

THE CROWD ROUND THE HOUSE IN OLD DRURY.

WHEN Sir Victor Cleeve reached the Great Western Railway Station on the morning of the 31st of August, he was astonished at the strange calmness of feeling which had succeeded to the terrible agitation he had felt for some hours after his leaving Baysford. He seemed to have a conviction that, come what would, he should be in time for it. And this conviction was not eradicated even after he got into a Hansom cab behind a shying horse, that progressed but slowly by reason of this infirmity.

He felt sure that he should be in time to find his wife, though "how" he would not suffer himself to conjecture. And some way he felt no angry impatience to get to her and no repugnance to meeting her. "And this is odd," he thought, "for I'm aware that I've been devilishly ill-treated." But though she said this to himself, he could not work himself up to feel angry with her.

He felt sure, also, that some great crisis in his life was approaching, and any crisis to a man situated as he was socially must be good—must shake and cause to totter some at least of the obstructions that were in his path. But for all this consciousness and knowledge of what must be and might be, he did not bound forward in his soul to meet it, but sat awaiting it in that Hansom cab behind the jibbing horse with a painful patience.

That drive from the Great Western station to the purlieus of Drury Lane was not long in reality, but during it he had time to think over all that had happened since that time twelvemonths ago, when he had landed in England a mere boy with his father's corpse. He remembered his journey down into Devonshire. He recalled those poignant sensations of pleasure he had experienced when his own coachman had suffered him to tool his own horses home. He remembered his first view of those two fair cousins of his—how they had framed themselves in a doorway, and then come forward

just at the right moment to save him from discomfiture when his interview with his awful guardian had been growing discomposing. He thought of his early love-passages with Alice Lisle, when Pickle had carried her, an admiring young devotee, along by his tall horse's side; and he had made what he, and she too, had thought was love to her, and had found it pleasant, and thought it true, and at any rate had *meant it well*. He thought of how he woke from that his youngest dream of love, and of how he had taken comfort even in the first hours of that awakening, in the thought that life had something better in store for him still. He remembered the sort of wound his *amour propre* had received when he first learnt that Alice had been sent away from him, and he had been treated like a boy; and how his wounds had been soothed by Madge, and his pride tried afresh by Charlie. He thought of how true the latter had been to him always; how true to him, and how kind to his wife—not "kind" in a way that could gall him as a husband—not kind in a way that said perpetually (or at all, in fact), "I am not as thou art," but after a human, womanly, tender fashion, that stood out in bold relief against the dark horizon of those past desolate months. He thought of his experiences in Aldershott—of his sledge-driving through the snow that melted too soon—of the downfall of his leader, and hopes of being deemed a good tandem whip. He thought of his brief engagement, and his hasty secret marriage, and the many irons that had been made to enter his soul since then; and last of all, he thought of what his dog Bully had done but the other day, and of the new character the woman he had married had appeared in then—that of a tender-hearted sympathizer with suffering, no matter where found. He recalled that scene which he had rushed upon—that frightful struggle between man and dog, in which his wife was striving to take a part when he came to the rescue. He saw again her fierce, set determination to save the man who was being worried, at any cost to herself. He saw again her agonizing expression of face when Claude had shouted out, "Get the woman away!

the dog is mad! And he said aloud, "She's brave and kind-hearted, let her be what she will," as the cab stopped at the address he had given in Old Drury, and he sprang to the ground.

There was a small crowd about the house he was about to enter, a policeman or two, and a couple of those sad-looking grey dogs who turn up on the shortest notice on the smallest excitement offering; and there were two or three of the brigands of England about, who are not picturesque by any means—men who do not wear the costume so common to their Italian brethren in fiction and bal-masques, but who wear their hands in what were pockets once on their own habiliments when they are not in those of the passers by, and upper lips longer than their noses and foreheads combined, and black eyes very often, and slits in their lips that are given them by their spouses and sweethearts, and the other gentle beings who make life sweet in that locality.

And there were women standing about, and small preternaturally sharp girls; and the former had the clear grey shot with red eyes of the habitual gin-drinker and confirmed virago and alley-brawler. They were women out of whom all womanhood had fled—fierce, hardened, terrible creatures, and yet they had the indelible stamp upon them!—they had not been wholly wrong all through their fearful career.

And the little girls who were dotted about—punctuating this page of human life—what things they were to behold and shrink from in their miserable precocity, and hideous facility for seizing upon the worst of their parents' salient points! They were miniature editions—perfect copies of the worst of their elders, as they stood there with their arms rolled up, after the manner of gossips, in their aprons, and their lips protruding, drinking-in, as it were, every sound that was floating about relative to the present and absorbing topic of discussion. They were awful things to behold and shrink from, these precocious alley Aspasia's—these mothers—that would be of the future generation of murderers and house-breakers.

Sir Victor Cleeve marked them well as he passed swiftly through the group to the door of the house, the number of which he had taken from the inverted letters in Madge's blotting-book; and he shuddered as he thought that it was through these, and such as these, his wife must have gone to the goal she had sought; and as he glanced round them a murmur arose, and he heard it distinctly suggested that he "was the doctor's young man."

He had his hand on the hasp of the door, for there was no knocker by which he could signalise his desire for admission, when this remark fell upon his ear. And as he turned momentarily to look upon the one who had made it, she stepped forward and said briskly—

"You may as well walk in, young man, being the doctor."

"But I'm not the doctor," he said; and then a feeling of oppression that was scarcely faintness came over him, and he felt that he could not enter that house in which a doctor was wanted just yet. So he stepped back almost into the crowd in his agitation, and asked—"Was any one ill in that house? or had anything happened?" And then arose a Babel, and every one volunteered to "tell him the rights on it." And when he had heard a few words he sped into the house, and up, up, led by instinct into a room where a woman lay in a horrible agony that was worse than death—an agony that was most exquisitely painful to witness, for you knew that no alleviation might ever come to it—an agony that, though it had lasted but a short time, had been powerful enough to destroy every vestige of the beauty that had been so brightly brilliant once—an agony that nothing but death could assuage, and that might endure for years. And the woman who endured it was Lucille, Lady Cleeve!

CHAPTER XLIII.

INCURABLE.

A SWEETLY tender story was told some two or three years since, the whole weight of which was made to rest on the broken back of a woman. It was a story of a pure young prosperous life, utterly blighted in a moment in the fullest zenith of its purity, prosperity, and youth. A story of a glorious young pair, who were quaffing freely of the wine of love and joy, and who had the goblet dashed from their lips in a sad hour, that bereft the husband of the bright sharer of every one of his well-loved out-door sports, and left the wife incurable! Every one will remember the story to which I allude—the sorrowful tender story that Mrs. Norton told of the “Lady of Garaye.”

For me, who contemplate introducing an incurable into these pages, to aver that I have no intention of either imitating or differing from Mrs. Norton’s “treatment of the case,” would be to call upon myself, from all but the weakest critic, the remark that I am “utterly incapable of doing either the one or the other, and that nothing but the grossest ignorance and conceit could have led me for an instant to suppose that I ever could do so.” It would be like the half apology I once heard made by an amiable village infant-schoolmaster, who prefaced a lecture he was going to deliver on the stars, with the declaration that he had not “the least wish to upset the world’s opinion of the Newtonian system.” I am afraid the infants did not appreciate the full extent of the magnanimity of this scientific flower born to blush unseen. But there were some present who did take in all the goodness and the glory of it, and amongst those who did was the writer of these pages, who now recalls the incident for the benefit of self and readers. As well might the ploughman-pedagogue aver his resolve to do no damage to the Newtonian system, as I declare that it was not my intention to tread the same path the gifted lady I have mentioned has already trodden,

or bray forth an assinine denial of a desire to crop at the laurels which gild the brow of the gifted daughter of a gifted race.

In that pitiful, thrilling, sadly-sweet story there was a lover-husband crushed by a blow that came upon one dearer to him than life. There was a band of loving, deploring, sympathetic friends; there was a troop of adoring, heart-stricken dependants and retainers: and each and all of these who sorrowed and mourned for her had, at least, this comfort in the midst of their sorrow and mourning—that she who suffered was a pure, young, pious girl, whose life was stainless, and whose heart and soul were clear. It was a fearful Cross that she was made to bear; but she was gifted with power from Heaven to bear it—though mutilated without, all within was fair, perfect and sound. “It was well with her,” despite her bodily affliction.

Sir Victor Cleeve had hardly recognised in the features and form of the poor, battered, mangled creature who lay upon the bed, in that sordid little room in the house in Old Drury, the features and the form of her whom he had taken to be his wife. She was living, breathing, but unconscious, mangled and destroyed out of all semblance of humanity, let alone of the beautiful woman she had been but the other day.

There was a woman in the room with her, a fearful old crone, covered with snuff, and exhaling fumes of tobacco and beer. And from her at last Victor brought himself to hear some of the story—not much of it, for she could not speak coherently.

Through her he at last obtained messengers, and one he sent off to a hospital for more efficient help than Lady Cleeve had yet received; the other he despatched with a telegram. But the last was a youth, and he forgot all about it till night fell. So poor Victor wearied all day in vain for a sympathetic word from those whom he thought would surely not fail him now.

“The lady was too late to see ’un after all,” the old woman said to Sir Victor, when he had made all the arrangements he could, and was waiting to hear the report of the two surgeons who were bending over the bed.

"Too late to see whom?" he asked. "Whom did she come to see?"

"I don't know his name rightly, for I was only had in to nurse 'un at the last, when he got weak and his riotousness was worn out. But he wrote for her hisself a few days ago, and the letter was mislaid, and only sent to her the day before yesterday, the lady of this house—who's now out a-charring, so you can't see *her*—tell me."

"Got riotous?" Sir Victor said, in a bewildered tone; and then, scarcely knowing what he was doing, he followed the old woman as she beckoned him through another door, and into a room, where upon a bed lay the dead body of the handsome gipsy-like tramp whom the mad bulldog had bitten.

"My God! what was her connexion with this man?" he thought; and then he added hastily—"God forgive her now, and have mercy upon her soul, whatever it was."

"What did this man die of?" he asked of the old woman, who was readjusting the sheet with which they had covered the corpse. And she answered—

"Hydrophoby, they call it—leastways, barks, and foamings, and growls, and suchlike, which always is the end of a mad dog's bite. His sufferings wasn't long, poor dear! The poor thing on the bed in there—your lady, sir, as I make bold to think—don't know he's gone yet, for the cab went right over her before she was well out of it, as one might say." And then she went on to tell him again how the lady had jumped out quickly, and her steel hoops had caught in something and would not give way, and she had been jerked back and down, and had shrieked and frightened the horse, which had just started back, passing the forewheels over her, and then forward, passing the hindwheels over her spine and head; and how then a "policeman had come up and taken the cabman's number, who was willing as the day to give it, being that sure in his own mind that 'no blame could be laid on him, let her be who she may,' he says. A well-spoken young man he were, to be sure, that cabman. 'Not if she were Queen Victorcy herself can I be blamed,' he says, as he druv off."

With this explanation, he quitted the room where the corpse of the man his dog had destroyed was lying, returning to the room where was the worse than corpse of his wife; and as he came forward, the surgeons advanced to meet him, and gave their judgments—the results of their serious, earnest deliberation and consultation. It was this—that his wife might live for years, a heavily-afflicted incurable!

How long the poor young fellow sat in that darksome room, trying to gauge the depth of this last deep sea of woe upon which he had been cast, he never knew. He could realize nothing; he could think of nothing but the awfulness of the thing, the deadening weight it would be, the ceaseless, ever-enduring misery. His life, that a year ago had been so fair a thing—what a dead, worse than dead waste it would be! The few thoughts he had ran in these despondent grooves, and from such thoughts he could not arouse himself.

He came to a consciousness of what was passing around him, after many hours, with a start, and then he was aware of cold and hunger and fatigue. While his mind had been prostrate, he had not been conscious of how utterly prostrate his body was; but he knew it when he took his hands from before his face and rose up and tried to walk, and found that he was faint from weakness.

And while he paused to recover himself by the foot of the bed where poor mutilated Lucille lay, the door opened very quietly, and Drummond Cleeve and his daughter Charlie came into the room. And when he saw them, despite his anguished doubts, despite his fears and uncertainty, and his great terror of the terrible future that had lately opened before him, Sir Victor Cleeve felt that even for him there was balm in Gilead still.

He told them all he knew, and all he feared and dreaded now. There was no longer the shadow of a reserve between them, for they had come to him in his great trouble like a father and a sister might have done. And they listened and shuddered when he told them of the handsome dead gipsy in the next room, and dreaded

what she might say about him if she were ever capable of saying anything at all.

"God knows what he may have been to her," Sir Victor said, with a shiver—"he may have been her husband!"

She was removed, under medical care, to a room they had prepared for her in comfortable lodgings in a quiet street at the West End. And after she had been there an hour or two, she opened her eyes, and looked at them all, and tried to move, and then gave a cry of pain and incapability. In a few minutes she remembered things as they had been before this blank, and asked, "Where is he? How is he?"

"Oh, Lucille, who was he?" Victor said, sorrowfully. And she replied—

"*Was* he? Then he is dead! He was my father."



CHAPTER XLIV

IN WHICH SOME ARE MARRIED—SOME ARE DEAD.

It is not necessary to trace the career from the commencement of the man who met his fate in the form of a rabid bull-dog that day in the Gate-house avenue. He had been many things before; but when the little Lucy first knew him for her father he was engaged, at a salary of a few shillings a week, as British tar and murderous miscreant at a transpontine theatre. In short, James Mitchell, husband and father, rent and tax-payer, working for his bread at regular, if not remarkably remunerative, employment, was respectable.

But there was gipsy blood in his veins, and it coursed all too hotly for regular respectability long to satisfy its cravings for excitement. The onus that was upon him of being punctual chafed his spirit, and made him think himself an injured man. He took to wondering who had his bottle of wine and loaf of bread; and after a short course of wondering where his own were, he fell to taking

other people's. He would not work—to beg he was ashamed; but he stole with a rare facility, that must have come by inheritance, as all our most perfectly-developed qualities do. He fell to thieving, and drinking, and vilely illtreating his wretched wife (the woman we have known, sonsy and happy, as Mrs. Mitchell) and daughter. And the woman soon loved him with but a lax love; but the beautiful child, who had her beauty from him, kept her filial feeling pure and undefiled through years of toil and degradation, and scenes of unhallowed mirth and revelry.

With the instinct of a wild beast for its young, after a fiercely passionate fashion, he would lavish love and caresses on the girl at times; and this kept her his adoring slave—tender to him when he was at the worst, and James Mitchell's worst was very bad.

The same feeling that prompted Madge Cleeve to take an oath voluntarily, from which her soul, her heart, her *taste* recoiled, prompted the daughter of a line, who had taken whene'er they had the power, and kept what'er they could of the spoils, to wreck herself for the father, worthless enough to allow her to do it; but low as she sank in the eyes of man, surely in the eyes of Heaven she was not wholly wrong. If ever a cause can sanctify sin, the love of a child, leading it to err for its father's sake, may do so.

So through childhood, girlhood, and womanhood, Lucy, promoted to Lucille Michel, slaved, and sorrowed, and sinned for her father; and he eat his bread in dishonest idleness, and was well pleased that it should be so, and greedily took all she could give him, and loudly asked for more; and she shut her eyes to his faults while she could, and when she could do that no longer, colour blindness afflicted her, and she did not see them so black as they were. And things might have gone on thus during the rest of her life; but one night James Mitchell went out with black crape over his face, and never home came he.

It nearly broke her heart at first; but hearts are not broken easily, and after a time the mere physical relief

his absence afforded to his daughter told on her spirits, and they rebounded, and she commenced a new and, what she meant to be, a better life. And now the falseness of her race came out, and she lied about what she had been, and was not a better woman than the one the root of whose evil had been a too deep devotion to her father.

She never saw him again till that day when he rolled out on the turf at her feet with the fierce bulldog at his throat; and then years and terrible experience had taught her something; so, though she showed herself capable of dying for him if need be, she was not capable of acknowledging and living with him again. And he, having a savage's idea of justice, felt that this thing was, and was right, and so left The Chase before he was tempted to drive her to confess.

Then, when he first felt the fatal poison of the mad dog's saliva working in his veins, he had written to her as has been seen; but the letter was mislaid, and not forwarded until too late, and then, as of old, she had gone at his bidding to her own destruction.

It was in the last August days that these things happened—one year from the time of Sir Victor Cleeve's first introduction to his cousins, when they had seen, almost with disappointment, what a boy he was still. Only a year ago, and now they would have given some of their own best hopes of happiness to see the boyish look on his face once more; but it was gone for ever.

Drummond Cleeve and his daughter stayed but a short time in London; they went back to Devonshire and tried—and tried in vain—to make people believe the truth respecting Lady Cleeve. The current and favourite report was that Lady Cleeve had been eloping in a private cab “with some one whose name should not be mentioned, because it was so very distressing to his family,” and that Nemesis had overtaken her by throwing her out of the cab and making it go over her. Mrs. Lisle was very sorry for it, but this report was the one she believed; but Alice knew better, and dared not say why she did so.

The Chase was shut up. Sir Victor asked his guardian

to go back and live there, and Drummond Cleeve would have been good enough to accede to his ward's request, but both daughters were against such a course, and he had to give in to them reluctantly. Mrs. Mitchell had gone to her crippled, mutilated daughter. So the rooms were recovered with brown holland, and the rats and spiders had it all their own way at Baysford Chase.

When Selwyn James came back from Scotland he found his wife considerably improved; the period of dulness with her mother had fully answered his expectations; and he congratulated himself upon the acumen which had induced him to send her there. She had been very much frightened by the results of her pirouetting on the edge of a precipice; and she was very grateful to Conway for the rare toleration he had shown to her—so grateful that she really tried to deserve it.

When she went back to Royston Hall she found the Lisles of the Court in woe and tribulation. Ida had conducted herself with most admirable discretion during the whole of the season. She had not wanted to show herself too freely; she had never flirted; she had danced more with the one duke out than with any one else; in fact, she had behaved just as a well-born beauty should behave.

Lady Lisle wrote letters four pages long to Mrs. Burroughes three times a week, expatiating on the beauty and holiness of this behaviour. "Ida was discretion itself," she wrote; "even Eustace was very much pleased with her." It was confidently expected that the duke would propose, if not before they left town, at least in September, when he was going down to Lisle Court for a few days' shooting. Lady Lisle called him the "dear duke" already; and Ida gave herself duchess-like airs to all her compeers—or at least to those who had been "entered"—for at sight of Miss Lisle's undoubted prowess their owners soon wisely scratched them. Lady Lisle told Dora that she had "unlimited confidence" in Ida, and that, in all humility, she did take very great credit to herself for the system she had pursued. And Miss Lisle listened to all the commendatory remarks, and

smiled sweetly, with a full knowledge of how well they were deserved. And at the end of the season she eloped with Mr. Wynne.

It was a fearful downfall, and Alice bitterly regretted her share in it. She would have concealed her knowledge of what had been going on back in the spring ; but Selwyn James had a sense of honour, and he compelled her to make a clean breast of it. The Lisles' wrath against her was dire, as was natural, for she had aided a young girl in tricking and deceiving her parents to her own ultimate ruin. Ida was not the kind of girl to contemplate the diamonds and diadem of a duke for three months, and then happily to forget their glitter in the home conducted on strictly economical principles which Mr. Wynne could give her.

Selwyn James continued to prohibit much intercourse between Dora Burroughes and his wife ; and the latter, like a wise woman, though she knew her husband to be wrong, gave way, and accepted his decree smilingly. And Dora declared her to be right, and showed herself so good-humouredly regardless of his opinion, that there is every probability of his altering it.

Sir Victor Cleeve took the wreck of what had been such a brightly beautiful woman abroad, for her state required warmth, and sun, and clear brightness, without damp, things all difficult to combine in England. They went to the South of France, and hired a farm-house ; and she tried to endure, and he tried to forget.

Communications with Baysford were not frequent. It was sad always to say the same thing, to repeat the same story of suffering, patiently borne, or to allude to a future that would be dreary, dull and monotonous as was this present. So Victor wrote but seldom to the cousins whose hearts he well knew were clouded by his sad fate.

He was most nobly, gravely kind to the poor woman who at first, after her recovery and confession, could scarcely meet his eyes with her own mournfully tender ones. But in time his brotherly care and attention

reassured her, and she ceased to wail and reproach herself for being the blight she was to him.

The few people round their almost solitary dwelling thought this sad-looking young man was the son of the crippled lady with the white hair and melancholy dark eyes. For her great affliction had aged her completely, and the settled, almost grand, air of resignation she wore furthered the illusion. And they blessed him for his abnegation of the world for his mother's sake.

It was a hard thing for a fiery young nature like Sir Victor Cleeve's to go and still itself down, at the dictates of duty, in attendance on a woman whom he had never loved, in such complete solitude as he now endured—to gather grapes, and read books, and wait with a son's gentle care on a crippled woman. Ah! it was a different life to the one he had planned for himself the first night he had laid his head on the pillow as Master of The Chase.

It was about six months after their settlement in the village farm-house in the south of France, and Victor had just come in weary and pale from a long stroll, taken for the sake of reaching a lake and giving his dog a swim. There had been an arrival of English letters and papers during his absence, and he just looked at the former and saw that they were not from Baysford, and then he took the paper up to Lucille's room to read her what news there might be that would interest her.

"And while you're finding something, give me the advertisement sheet," she said. And he handed it to her, and she glanced at what gold brooches and terriers had been lost lately, and who were born and married.

"Victor, how odd they shouldn't have written to you!" she exclaimed, after a minute. "Here's your cousin's marriage to Captain Conway James."

Was it a guilty pang that shot through his heart? He asked himself the question as he sat there unable to speak, and unwilling that his deep distress should be made apparent to the poor helpless woman who was unconscious that this news was a pang to him. Was there

guilt in the pang the husband of that wife felt when he heard that his cousin was married?

"How strange that they should not have written to you!" she repeated. "I wonder at Madge."

"Oh, perhaps Madge has had plenty else to do in the confusion caused by her sister's marriage," he said.

And then his wife exclaimed—

"Good gracious! I thought I *said* it's Madge who's married?"

"God bless her, I hope she'll be happy," he cried, heartily. "The news so surprised me at first that I couldn't say anything; dear Madge, I hope she'll be happy." And if his hopes were as genuine as the joy that sparkled in his eyes, they were true things indeed.

"Perhaps, if they come abroad, they'll come and see us," Lady Cleeve said. And then she burst into tears, and said that she would like to see Madge once more, to thank her for being the means of her husband following her, when she would otherwise have been left unconscious and uncared for in her anguish. "And I don't think I shall 'cumber the earth' much longer," she went on. "And that thought's my best comfort, Victor."

Captain Conway James had bided his time, and very patiently laid siege to Madge Cleeve's heart. But when he did eventually propose to her, a very unexpected obstacle occurred. She told him that she liked him, and acknowledged that she would be very glad to marry him, "but I am determined on not marrying any man who can't place papa in an independent—a moderately independent—position. And that it is not at all likely that you can do."

It was a mountainous obstruction to his attainment of the felicity on which he had set his heart; but the young lady was very firm.

"I am sorry for you, and I am sorry for myself," she said; "but it cannot be helped. I made a very solemn vow that I'd marry a certain man and assure my father's future comfort in life. A portion of the oath is broken, but I will keep the other and better portion."

And when she said this, and showed herself to be fully determined, Captain Conway James set himself to consider how he could aid her to accede to his wishes.

He had plenty of wealth, honesty, and sincerity, and fortune favours the wealthy, honest, and sincere. The member for a borough where his family had great interest died, and a new member elected by means of the Jameses reigned in his stead. The new man was a son of one of the heads of the Government department, a man of great weight in the Civil Service. By this means Mr. Drummond Cleeve was appointed to a consulship with three hundred a year (he didn't like it), in a healthy town on the borders of the Mediterranean. He did not like it at first—it was so very inferior to anything he had ever contemplated. But on learning that his eldest daughter had refused to assure her own happiness until she gained even so much for him, he was a little touched—quite enough so in fact to take it with a good grace.

So Madge married Conway James, and the rest of the family went away to the seat of the Consulship, and the Gate-house returned to its normal gloom.

People began to say that the race of Cleeve must be cursed, or something like it, and to hint that the baby (heir presumptive), would never live to come to the title, which would be extinct when Sir Victor, who was tied to a woman who would never be a mother—died. And it was pronounced to be a great pity, this state of things, for the Cleeves had flourished too long in the land to be idly rooted out.

Time went on, and the day that would have been proudly looked forward to—the day when the baronet would come of age—approached, and Baysford was confirmed in its conjectures and fears as to the fading away of the family. Directions came from abroad as to the ordering of festivities. And the proposed festivities, though comely and meet enough, were felt to be of a less festive nature than was desirable on the coming of age of the head of the house. Money was to be given to the poor, and a dinner to the tenants, and tea and cakes to the Baysford children. But not a word was said about re-

opening The Chase and doing away with any of the dust preparatory to the lord's return.

It began to be understood and felt and regretted as a solemn, sorry truth that they might never hope to see the bright face of the young owner of the place among them again; and practical-minded people said it was a pity he did not lease The Chase for one and twenty years, and his steward was counselled to write and suggest this measure to him. And indeed, they talked of Sir Victor Cleeve altogether as of one who might never come back again.

The drama is nearly acted out, and the stage must be cleared. Away in that farmhouse in the soft warm climate of the south of France, a woman lay dying. A broken, contrite, deeply afflicted, and as far as fellow mortals could judge—a truly repentant woman, who felt that it was good that she should die—far better for herself and others than that she should live.

There was no travestie of mourning about her death-bed; no harrowing scene from which a sharply pointed moral may be drawn. The man she had married and blighted had been most manfully patient and kind, but he could not lie in a false attempt to soothe and say that he grieved for that which might prove a rare blessing to him—her death. He was not a hypocrite: he shed no tears now, though he had done so when he had found her in that fearful case which he scarcely dared to investigate. He shed no tears, but he forgave her; and she trusted that God would do so also.

She had embraced another faith than the national one of her land during her residence in France—an older faith than ours, who have protested against many of its most soothing forms. A faith, the visible sigus of which may be faulty—man's embodiment of the intangible always is—but which have a calming, reassuring influence that cannot be dangerous, since it calms many a dying bed. Hope for the future must be good. And if the one *in extremis* be soothed by the hope of being permitted to sing hymns eternally, or to sit upon a golden throne, or to scour well-stocked prairies, on fleet horses

that are dear to them in this world, in the happy hunting grounds of the next, it is surely good that they should be so; and none need cavil at the cause which gives comfort at the last.

With a humble remembrance of those words which bid us "judge not, that we be not judged," let the statement stand that Lucille, pardoned by her priest, died at peace with her God.

They buried her in a charming cemetery, the gardener of which has two francs a-week for keeping a wreath on her head stone and a design in *immortelles* on her tomb. And better than these, Sir Victor, her husband, has no unkindly memories of her; for he learnt during that solitary time abroad, that if her worst was bad indeed, her best might shine with the brightest of some of those who reviled and deemed her wholly wrong.

As there was no affectation of sorrow or sentiment at her death, so likewise was there none on his part on the departure of his mother-in-law. Mrs. Mitchell insisted, rather to his discomfort, on seeing him immediately before she left; and he had to stand in his most erect posture, and hold his head up higher than usual, or she would have kissed him. Her parting speeches were less effusive than they would have been if she had not had so much luggage on her mind; she was taking away Lucille's wardrobe; the new silk dresses were substantial comforts to the bereaved mother. "Good-bye; you was very good to us all through," she said to Sir Victor, with tears in her eyes; "and I'm sorry to think that I shall never see you again; but so 'tis, I suppose."

And Victor, whose desire for future intercourse was not strong, said he "supposed so."

"That, and the 'eat under this load of black—which is *not* the crape I should ha' had for my money if I'd a choosed it myself, but that's neither here nor there—is a'most too much for me," she said.

And then she made that inclination of a wish to kiss him which has been alluded to above. And he evaded it, remembering the girl whose cheek his lips had pressed

that day his wife had been cut by the county. And so with another shake of the hand they parted. And Sir Victor Cleeve was left alone—a free man.

CHAPTER XLV.

A STROKE OF GENIUS.

IF I said that Drummond Cleeve delighted in his new career and was affectionately grateful to those who had in a measure thrust it upon him, I should assert that which, in the face of the man's character, my readers would feel to be utterly false. Elderly men very seldom do delight in any new career that is not a great improvement upon the old, and Drummond Cleeve's was no exceptional nature. He cannot be blamed for this lax regard for a thing that even if it were not good in itself, was still much better than his deserts entitled him to expect. Men's habits, and feelings, and ideas of what is pleasant do not alter materially after half a century's adherence to and belief in them as right and proper. A moderate income in London, surrounded by the sights and sounds and customs amongst which he had grown up, would have been far more congenial to him than the competency and the busy idleness of this life in the south. He was compelled to be civil to merchant captains, and acquainted, aye, even intimate with 'P.' & 'O.' people; and it went against the grain with him to be these things.

Besides, he had to keep accounts, and the sternest must allow that this is a painful obligation to be laid upon a man well stricken in years, who has never accustomed himself to the keeping of these things in his youth. Drummond Cleeve had kept many things, from Lent to late hours, in his time, but never accounts, and now the onus was upon him of keeping a rigorous eye to expenditure that did not so much concern himself as a "beggary government that had given him nothing better than a wretched consulate, worth only three hundred a year."

The representative of her Britannic Majesty's interests and importance in the little town on the borders of the Mediterranean took no glory to himself for his position. To every one but his elder daughter he made his sentiments on the subject perfectly clear; but from Mrs. Conway James, at Charlie's earnest plea, he kept his chagrin at fate and her husband having placed him where he was. The English gentleman was out of his element in fact, and he made himself unpleasant to those who officially crossed his path, with a wealth of calm unpleasantness that is one of the special attributes of men of his nature and nation.

He tasted joy for the first time when he heard of the death of the woman who had been the cause of his being so rudely dislodged from The Chase. The hope that Madge had soothed him with when the news first came of Sir Arthur Cleeve's death in Paris bloomed again, for Sir Victor was free to choose now, and Charlie was free to be chosen, and lovelier than ever, Mr. Cleeve was very thankful now that his golden-haired daughter had proved the strength of her Cleeve will in the Tregoeaf affair. It was on the cards now that she should marry her cousin, and the Tregoeaf affair became a puerile thing at once in his eyes. If he could not reign at The Chase himself, the next best thing was that his child should do so, and when she did so reign, Mr. Cleeve determined that the consulate should not know him much longer.

"We can't be too thankful that Heaven has been pleased to take that —— woman, and spare Charlie's complexion in this frying-pan of a place," he wrote to his eldest daughter; and Mrs. Conway James, whose feverish pulses had been calmed down considerably by this time, began to wonder on what sort of terms Charlie and herself would be when the inevitable marriage took place.

Mrs. Conway James was a very happy woman in those days. She had the satisfaction of being a highly appreciated wife, and of having aided in placing her father in a position of independence, though not of such affluence as she would have desired for him, and he would have desired for himself. Her life was a very peaceful one—

one of golden bliss indeed, compared with the old one of poverty in London, and of plotting and planning at The Chase.

Unlike his brother, Captain James had a profound reliance on the woman of whom he had thought well enough to make her his wife ; and she, despite her many faults, fully justified this reliance, and gained a very fair share of popularity at the same time. Conway James knew that if he so willed it, Madge might be left for any number of weeks. There would be perfect safety in his indulging in the delights of bachelor quarters in the Highlands next August if he liked.

The Conway Jameses had no fixed abode. She talked of herself as a soldier's wife, and said she must follow the regiment, therefore it was not worth while for her to have a house. But when the news of Lady Cleeve's death came to England, she remembered the old strong attachment which had subsisted between Charlie and herself, and she said to her husband when she handed him her father's letter to read—

"That's sure to come about now, Conway—and won't it be pleasant to go and settle somewhere near The Chase when it does?"

"It wouldn't be a bad plan," Conway James replied. "Settling in the country is hideous, unless a man settles near some one, and I've a strong fancy that Cleeve and Charlie would be more agreeable than Selwyn and Alice for a constancy."

"Then you won't mind selling out?"

"No, I shall rather like it. Cleeve and I will keep a pack of hounds between us."

"And Charlie and I will institute an archery club, and devise a killing uniform for it. Usually, fair toxophilites, as ladies' newspapers call them, look odious, they're so badly dressed—green, you know, Conway ; so few women can stand green."

"I'm ready to offer you any odds, Madge, that as soon as Cleeve marries Charlie, your father will find that the climate disagrees with him, and will make his way back with all speed to join the happy family party."

And Mrs. Conway James, feeling that there was great justice in this estimate of her papa's character, blushed a little, but still she said—

“And it will be an uncommonly happy family group, Conway. We have had a good many trials of various sorts, and I can't tell you what a darling Charlie has been through them all. I don't think it wicked to say, thank God Lady Cleeve is dead, for her life has never been a blessing to herself or any one else, poor thing, and latterly it has been a curse.”

They were on their way to Royston Hall when they spoke in this way about the pleasant prospect opened to Charlie and themselves by Lady Cleeve's death. It was the first visit Mrs. Conway had paid to Mrs. Selwyn James. Ida Lisle's marriage had caused the latter to collapse, as it were, for a time, for both Ida and Mr. Wynne asserted that she had been instrumental in bringing them together. But lately some other nine days' wonder had engrossed local attention, and so Mrs. Selwyn James plucked up heart of grace again.

Strange to say, the invitation to his brother and his brother's wife had emanated from Selwyn James himself, and it had been the spontaneous effort of his own mind, unassisted by any suggestion from Alice. Indeed, to tell the truth, Alice felt rather more comfortable out of Conway James's presence than in it. She was grateful to him for what he had done, and for what he had left undone. But she infinitely preferred him at a distance, and with a lively remembrance of what Madge had been to her in the old Pickle days, she was rather afraid of her sister-in-law.

But the disagreeables her mind had created disappeared in their presence like the morning mist at sunrise. Conway appeared to have utterly forgotten that contemplated journey to town which he had frustrated. And Madge had never known anything about it, therefore she had no unpleasant knowledge to conceal. On the whole, Mrs. Selwyn James found this intimate communion with her brother's wife so much to her taste, that she urged

that if it could not be prolonged now, it might be soon renewed.

"Why couldn't you go abroad with us?" she asked of Madge. "Selwyn is going to take me to Marseilles in December, and I shall hate going alone with him—that is, I shall like it of course, but I should like it ten times as well if Conway and you would come too."

"And then we might all go on together and see papa and Charlie," Madge said, half entertaining the idea; "that would be very nice."

"Delightful! and I should always have some one to speak to when we're stopping at places and Selwyn's out. I have so wished to ask him to let me ask the Burroughses to go with us, and I haven't dared, because he used not to like Dora; but I have thought, oh! ever so much, about what I should do all alone at hotels when he's out, and I mustn't put my nose outside the door.

"I don't know that our being with you will give your nose greater liberty, Alice, but I am with you heartily in the plan; my cousin Victor must meet us there, and we'll renew the old days."

"Not quite the old days," Mrs. Selwyn James said with a blush. "In the old days you used to be watching that Sir Victor did not think too much about me, and now I suspect we shall be——"

"Watching to see that he does think a great deal about Charlie!" Madge interrupted. "Well, Alice you're right, I acknowledge; but if I was against you—and I confess that as things turned out I was wrong—Charlie never was—she would have had you married to Victor without the slightest let or hindrance from anybody, so you mustn't grudge her the good thing that she would never have grudged you."

"Oh! I don't know about it's being such a much better thing than I got after all," Alice replied quickly. "I suppose you don't think you've married badly, and Selwyn's the elder son you know."

And then Madge got up and made her sister-in-law a little bow of mock deference, and told her that—

"All the honour and glory due to the head of the

family shall be paid to the wife of the cadet—all the more willingly, my dear Alice, because you've put it into my head now to go and by disturbing the even tenor of their way bring those people's affairs to a climax; a family gathering will be the very thing to make Victor think that he'll be wrong to leave himself unsettled any longer."

"You don't think that seeing me will—will——"

"Will what?" Madge asked.

"Put Charlie out of his head again, because I wouldn't for the world be the cause of unsettling his affections," Mrs. Selwyn James said, gravely.

"Oh! dear, no—you needn't be in the least afraid of that," Madge said, laughing. "I'm sure Charlie has too high an opinion of you to be in the slightest degree jealous—that is," she hastily continued, for she saw that Alice scarcely liked the tone she had used with regard to Victor's indifference to her once-loved charms.

So it came about through this conversation that a new programme was arranged for the winter. The idea of going abroad together was as pleasant to the two brothers as it had been to their wives.

"Couldn't you come here the latter end of December for a couple of weeks' hunting Conway, and we could start together, stay a few days in Marseilles, and then go on to your wife's people in January? What do you say?"

"I say that I shall be delighted, old fellow, particularly with the first part of the plan. Madge hopes that our all meeting there will be the signal for Cleeve to take the hatband off: that was a bad business altogether, and the sooner he has another wife the better."

"He must have been awfully green, though, to be let into such a thing by that woman," Selwyn James said, complacently; he was thinking of what Mrs. Lisle had told him relative to the young baronet having wanted to marry Alice.

"He was led into it by one of the greatest scoundrels unhung," Conway James said, hotly.

"Aye; and who's that?" his brother asked, with gentle curiosity.

"Claude Ogilvie. I didn't know it when I brought him here, or I shouldn't have brought him."

"And how do you know it now?" and as Selwyn James asked it, he made a gesture as though he was throwing dice out of a box.

"Oh, no, nothing of that sort," Conway replied; "I am not at liberty to say how I know it! but he is a scoundrel."

("Young fellow's been flirting with Conway's wife,") Selwyn James thought commiseratingly; ("that's the worst of those flashy girls; he should have looked out for a quiet, good little simple thing like Alice.")

Soon after this Captain and Mrs. James left Royston Hall, promising to come back in December; and when they were gone Selwyn James repeated what his brother had told him relative to Claude Ogilvie to his wife.

"You remember that young fellow Conway brought here in the spring, Alice—the Baby, as they called him?"

"Now do we have so many visitors that I am likely to forget one, Selwyn?" she said, lightly; but though she spoke lightly she was trembling in every limb.

"Well, he's an ungrateful dog," he said; and then he went on and told her word for word what his brother had said.

"I have no doubt Conway is right; but it's very harsh."

"He deserves harsher than that, and so does she; and he'd get it too if I were in Conway's place," Mr. James replied. "Madge belongs to the same genus as that cousin of yours, Alice; they're just the sort of women that are very agreeable as acquaintances, but they're the very devil as wives."

And Alice for her sins had to sit still and listen to this wholesale condemnation of women who were truer and better than she herself was. To listen and utter no word of defence.

But not alone was Alice lacking in the courage that would have urged her to speak in defence of those whom in heart, she knew to be blameless; but her quickly-quailing heart, and her small, little diplomatic mind, urged her to blame them very often both to her husband

and to her austere relative, Lady Lisle, into whose favour she was again creeping. She deemed that the surest way to impress them with a proper notion of her own very superior morals and prudence would be to shake her head and lament the tottering condition and microscopic proportions of the morals and prudence of other women. She observed that the women who did this persistently were always very much respected. And Alice desired to be very much respected, and came to the conclusion that the easiest way of gaining such respect was to throw stones right and left, and be very rigorous in her judgment altogether.

She won Lady Lisle round to her side by a stroke of almost genius. She received a letter from Mrs. Wynne, one day, a letter full of light-hearted impertinences and exorbitant demands. "It's no use writing to the Court for anything because we shouldn't get it," Ida said, candidly; "and I'm huffed with Dora because she said I acted deceitfully; and if I did, it's no business of hers. You were always glad to remember our consanguinity when we were in town, and your husband's worthy relatives turned out to be respectable and nothing more; let me recall it to your mind now, and hint that country cousins always supply their London relatives with such trifles as cream and poultry and hams. Send a good big hamper, there's a dear, and fill up all the little crevices with jam; everything is so dear here, and you know you're as much to blame as I am, if there's any blame called for, by my marriage."

On receipt of this letter she drove to Mrs. Burroughes's house, and repeated as much of its contents as seemed good to her. "You might join me in a hamper, Dora," she said, meaning that Mrs. Burroughes might join her in filling one with viands, not that she might meet her in one in the flesh; "till you do Ida will feel that you consider her deceitful."

"And so I do think her deceitful, Alice. I could have forgiven her marrying Wynne in a moment, but I cannot pretend to think that she acted in any other than a deceitful way in marrying him as she did."

"While you say that Ida wont have anything from you."

"Then she must go without them, for I must say it. I'd send her anything gladly, but I wont send her a false opinion of her conduct; if she wont take my cream and chickens till I tell her I think she behaved straightforwardly and truthfully, she'll never take them at all, I'm thinking."

"Well, I hardly call it sisterly," Alice said virtuously. Alice was grand just about this time on the duty of attending to one's moral and social obligations; she favoured Mrs. Burroughes largely with her views on those subjects, for Dora knew nothing of how she had employed herself during the dull time she had spent with her mother at Baysford.

When she left Dora, Mrs. Selwyn James drove boldly to Lisle Court. She had not been there since Ida's flight, and as she went up the avenue the rooks seemed to caw out a caution against being over-adventurous. Lady Lisle was a terrible woman to tackle single-handed, even when you had right on your side. When your cause was a bad one, Lady Lisle was a foe against whom not one in a thousand could stand.

But Mrs. Selwyn James was fraught with the courage of despair. It nearly broke her heart to be tabooed by the chiefs of her race in this way. She had been taught to revere them all her life; there had been a special clause inserted in her infant prayers in which the Divine grace and protection was implored for Sir Bernard Lisle. Indeed, on more than one occasion, a slight confusion having arisen in her young mind, she had said her prayers to him, and gone to bed with the blessed conviction of having done something very good. She had been steeped in reverence for him and for Lady Lisle; and she could not shake off the feeling of their smiles and frowns being of colossal magnitude.

She went into Lady Lisle's iron-gray presence this day with her soul fraught with the courage of despair and with Ida's letter, by way of a shield and buckler, in her mind. Lady Lisle was seated in her morning room

when Alice went in ; and it was a room that, though it might be comfortable to a constant inhabitant, was a very unpleasant apartment to the casual guest.

It had about it the air of being hermetically sealed, for the doors were all done with flannel list, and the windows blockaded at every crevice with sand-bags covered with moreen, looking like huge sausages. The large table that was drawn up close to Lady Lisle's easy chair was covered with flannel tippets and brownholland ties and blouses and fuzzy-looking knitted stockings. Sprinkled lightly amongst these things were a number of tracts of the awakening and alarming order. Lady Lisle always read harrowing appeals and added largely to the Dorcas bag when she was ill in mind or body ; and since Ida's defection and the downfall of her hopes concerning the Duke, the disappointed mother had been ill in both.

Alice found great difficulty in walking steadily across the room when Lady Lisle lifted her reproachful eyes from the tract or tippet (she had both in her lap) on which she was engaged. Mrs. Selwyn James's steps faltered and her heart beat thickly, but she nerved herself with the thought of what a terrible thing was the withdrawal of the Lisles' smiles—snobbishness often imparts an appearance of courage to its possessor.

Lady Lisle looked up. The chieftainess of the house was one of those women who have enjoyed the reputation of dignified beauty in girlhood, and a dignified girl must, in the nature of things, develope into rather an overpowering old woman. As soon as she raised her cold, steady eyes, and turned the light of her composed leaden-hued countenance on Alice, Alice felt that she had been brave to the point of rashness in thus presenting herself before Lady Lisle with no other armour than her integrity of purpose, and with Ida's letter alone for her shield and buckler.

But in this letter, as she had at first vaguely divined, her true safety lay. Lady Lisle was capable of encasing herself in an armour of pride and religion when time was allowed her. But when she was taken by surprise, as

Alice took her now, her motherhood asserted itself, and she was ready to hoist the white flag, or go over to the enemy, or do anything that might be required of her indeed, like the true woman she was!

There is no doubt about it, people say very commonplace things on very momentous occasions. This was a very momentous occasion to Alice James—for the idea of living on in the county, and being lightly regarded by the magnates of it through the Lisle's disavowal of her, was painful to her in the extreme. It was a very momentous occasion to her, but all she could say was—

"How do you do, Lady Lisle? Isn't it cold?" And I doubt whether a single one of my readers, under similar circumstances, would have said much more! Speeches in real life are apt to be puerile.

"Very cold indeed," Lady Lisle said, rising partially from her chair, and then sinking back again amongst her cushions with a quick remembrance of Alice's sin. "Did you drive over?"

The question was about as sensible as if she had said. "Did you come upon your head," for there was no railroad between Royston Hall and Lisle Court, and it was altogether out of walking distance. However it was something to say, therefore Lady Lisle said it.

"I ventured to come on account of this," Alice said; and then she instituted an imaginary search in her pockets, and did not find the letter from Ida, for she had been extremely careful to leave it behind her. "Oh, I haven't brought it with me, after all, dear Ida's letter," she exclaimed, in the old ingenuous voice that went so well with the peachy face and the reliant eyes. And then Lady Lisle tremulously declared that she "wanted to hear nothing at all about Ida," and of course listened thrice more attentively than before her declaration. And Alice proceeded to paint a pitiful picture of the beautiful bride who might have been a duchess upon short commons, and Lady Lisle listened with every ear she had.

"She might have appealed to me if she was in such dire want," Lady Lisle said at last, for Alice related the

appeal for the hamper in a way that made her ladyship imagine her daughter on the brink of starvation.

"She knows how justly angry you are, and she dares not," Alice rejoined; "and her sister—well, I don't wish to say a word against Dora, but really she would accompany her gift to Ida with such hard words that the gift could hardly be taken."

"And Mrs. Wynne knows she has a friend in you," Lady Lisle said, and she tried to say it scornfully.

And then Alice made her grand effort and won the day.

"I thought it might be a comfort to you to know," she said, with a burst of emotion, "that such poor friendship as I can show to Ida I shall always be ready to show."

"Ah, my dear," Lady Lisle said; "you are right, Alice, you are right. I never can forget that I am her mother; and though Sir Bernard won't hear of receiving him—that man that took her away"—(Lady Lisle forbore to consider how uncommonly ready the young lady had been to be taken)—still I can't forget that I'm her mother, and you may tell her that I forgive her."

After this Alice found it an easy matter to carry the remaining defences. Lady Lisle, whose heart, despite her iron-grey exterior, had often yearned towards her child, was delighted to avail herself of Mrs. Selwyn James's mediumship in communicating with Ida, and doing the beauty who had fallen from such a high estate substantial kindnesses. Sir Bernard had said less about his hopes respecting the girl and his disappointment, when she eloped than any other member of the family. But his hopes had been very high and his disappointment horribly bitter, and he would suffer neither recognition nor aid to be extended to them. This being the case, packing surreptitious hampers and transmitting the same to Ida through Mr. Selwyn James, afforded Lady Lisle a sort of half guilty pleasure. Her husband would have forbidden these things had they been done openly, and Lady Lisle was woman enough to experience a certain satisfaction in doing that which as an obedient wife she ought not to have done.

And as Alice was her agent in these good maternal

deeds of darkness, Alice stood very high in the favour of the lady of Lisle Court. "You must be with me a great deal next season, dear," she would say to Alice. And Alice blushed with pleasure at the prospect, but said—

"Oh yes—as much as I can, that is, for I shall be very much engaged I fear next season; a connexion of mine, my sister-in-law's sister, will be married to Sir Victor by that time—Charlie Cleeve, you remember her? and she'll come out as a bride and take up all our time."

But still, though she said this, the prospect of moving in Lady Lisle's orbit was delightful, and she resolved to give an unmistakably cold shoulder to those who had rolled up from Highgate and Hampstead to do her homage on the occasion of her first appearance in town.

Mrs. Wynne fully recognised the stroke of genius by which Alice had regained a footing at Lisle Court.

"Look here, Fred," she said to her husband when the united efforts of Lady Lisle and Mrs. James were unpacked, and Alice's letter containing the message from the mother had been read; "that little sycophant Alice is wriggling into mamma's good graces, through pretending a great affection for me, I feel sure. As she's so fond of me, she may as well have us down there in the autumn when we've no place else to go to, and then I'll make her take me to the Court, and carry mamma by storm."

"That Mrs. Selwyn James always was good-natured," Mr. Wynne replied. And then his wife laughed at his judgment, and declared Alice's good-nature to be of that order which comes from an inability to be anything else.

"I always used to feel," the young lady continued, "that she smiled so sweetly because it involved a smaller muscular and mental effort to do so than either to look grave or to frown. That's the secret of the amiability of half the sweet women, Fred; they haven't strength of purpose to be anything else. My sister Dora is worth a dozen of her."

Meanwhile, the months were wearing away, and the

time for Captain and Mrs. Conway James's return to Royston Hall came. The plan that Madge had sketched out on her former visit had been rapturously applauded by Charlie, over whose letters there was a glow that only comes from the brightest sunshine of the heart. Madge had suffered from some pangs, of remembrance when the news of Lucille's death, and the probability of Charlie after all filling the vacant post, was made known to her. It had occurred to Mrs. Conway James that, though the old wrath had died out in her sister, the contempt she had so freely expressed for Madge's machinations might still exist; but, after the receipt of two or three of Charlie's letters, the truth came home to her. Charlie was too happy, too hopeful, too blessed in some unuttered but all-pervading conviction, to suffer any unpleasant remembrance to live in her mind.

"Victor will meet you here," she wrote; "it's all arranged; we wont have him before you come for divers reasons—the most prominent of which is, that we may have pleasure in a large lump; we wont have it broken into bits by your dropping in one after the other. It's a great joke, but do you know Victor's steward has written to him to suggest letting The Chase! as if he'd ever let the dear old Chase." And when she read this, Mrs. Conway James felt that "it would be all right in time."

"And we'll settle somewhere near them, Conway?"

"Yes; and your father will settle at the Gate-house," Conway said, laughing. "I don't care, my dear—I was not at all interested in his retention of the appointment a moment after his acceptance of it had got me my wife."

So they settled and arranged matters in England. And in Italy, by the blue waters of the port whose British interests he was supposed to guard, Mr. Cleeve soothed himself for the politeness he was compelled to extend to uncongenial people by reflecting that he would have done with such abominations the instant his daughter became Lady Cleeve.

And his daughter said nothing; but not the sky above her or the sea below, were deeper, brighter, and clearer

with the depth, brightness, and clearness of love and joy than were her eyes in these days.

There was a slight hitch in the James's arrangements after all, when it came to the point. Not in the hunting part of them, but in the start for the Continent. Some change in the regiment involved the necessity of Conway James remaining with it. There were many very young men in the corps, and the blood ran warm in the veins of these British officers and "gentlemen by birth"—for that most of them were. The blood ran warm, and led them on to the commission of various volatile acts that were reprehensible even when viewed as the volatile acts of very young men. They cultivated a taste for practical jokes amongst themselves, and when they discovered a tender spot in any one who was unpopular, they did not exactly pour balm and oil into the wound; on the contrary, they aggravated it by a variety of boyishly delicate attentions. And the honour of the army not being an idle boast, these delicate attentions met with the just rebuke they merited from the Horse Guards, and there was a general row in the regiment.

Which row is only of importance in this place in that it altered Conway James's plans, and prevented his going abroad with his brother. And so Mr. and Mrs. Selwyn James started for Marseilles alone—with the understanding that they were to await there the Conway Jameses, who were to join immediately on the settlement of the regimental misunderstanding.

CHAPTER XLVI.

STEP GENTLY.

THE young man who had buried the wife whom he had never loved—the cousin who must after such a cloudy time have sorely needed the sunshine of the loving presence of the only relatives he possessed—did not come to them for several months after the design in *immortelles* had been first laid upon the tomb of Lucille Lady Cleeve. He wrote to them frequently, identifying them with his interests in a way that was very pleasant to Charlie; but that made her feel that it would be better perhaps that he should not come to them just yet. Indeed, it was on her suggestion that he acted. "It's much too warm in this place for you now," she wrote, a week or two after Lucille's death; "take your dog and alpenstock, and try what a time amongst glaciers and Swiss Châlets will do for you. All the Jameses (Selwyns and Conways too) are coming to us in January, and you must come also then, and tell us your adventures, and show us how you look."

So she wrote, suggesting what would be well for them both, and he accepted the suggestion, all the more readily from feeling what must have been in her heart when she made it. The knowledge that the citadel only shrank from capitulating too soon made him less impatient to besiege it. So he only cherished the image of the girl who had been true to him all through with a truth that the most adoring and exacting wife could never have questioned—only cherished her image the more fondly, and bided, with a proud reliance on her, his time for seeking the reality.

But when January approached he grew less patient, less reticent, and his love for her welled up and made him doubt whether this joy that was to compensate him for so much would be his or not. She was a pure, frank, loving woman, he knew; but other hearts had beat hotly

for him once, and then for another. And Charlie had never nursed her love, never suffered him to give her anything to feed it upon, and had not seconded his desire to hasten to her as soon as his wife was dead. Thus he would think and doubt for one minute, and the next he would do the bright loyal nature justice again. But still, as January approached, he grew very impatient.

At last came a letter from Charlie, telling him that they had had a disappointment. The Conway Jameses had not come to Marseilles on the day they were expected, therefore the Selwyn Jameses, who had been awaiting their brother and sister there, had come on without them. "I have not seen them yet," she wrote, "but I have this moment received a note from Alice at the hotel, asking me to reverse the arrangement and go down to dine with her to-day as she has a headache, instead of their coming to us, I hope you wont fail us now, Victor, and that Conway and Madge will arrive shortly;" and then she signed herself his "affectionate cousin," and her heart beat more quickly as she reflected that if he started on receipt of it, how more than probable it was that this would be the last time she would so sign herself. The familiar signature would be merged in a nearer and dearer.

And almost the same thought came into his mind as he read this last letter from this chosen of his heart and judgment. "Heaven bless her for all she's been to me!" he thought; and then his pulse went quicker at the thought of how much more she would be to him in the future than she had been in the past.

He was a man now—a man in the eyes of the law, and a man in the eyes of men. His folly had matured him sadly. But his brave endurance of the fruits of that folly had matured him nobly. The unclouded flashing boy's beauty had fled from his face, and the restlessness that was still graceful from his manner. But better things had come in the place of those that had fled. The gravity that was not sorrow, and the composure that was not stagnation, made the manhood of Sir Victor Cleeve a finer thing in woman's eyes, if not a fairer, than the cloudless brilliancy of his youth had been.

It was a field of fair promise that stretched out before him now. The onus was on him of redeeming the name, and removing every speck and stain that had come upon it through his father's vice and his own weakness ; and he felt that the power was in him also, and that the work would be done well. And he felt, also, that she of whom he was more worthy now, despite the ordeal he had passed, than he had been in his blind boyhood, would be a rarely efficient coadjutor in every good work.

It was five or six days after the receipt of Charlie's letter before Sir Victor Cleeve could reach the town where Drummond Claire Cleeve, Esq., represented her Britannic Majesty's interests ; and as he stood at the door of the consulate, and turned for an instant while awaiting admission, the future lay fair, clear, and bright before him as the blue Mediterranean on which he gazed.

When Charlie Cleeve went down to the hotel, from which Mrs. Selwyn James had despatched her note, something appeared to have ruffled that lady's temper. She was lying on a couch when Charlie entered her room, but she sprang off it rather animatedly as soon as she saw her guest, and sent down a message to her husband, announcing her intention of having tea in her own room, instead of going to dinner.

"I'm so glad you've come," she said, heartily kissing Charlie. "Selwyn wanted me not to send for you ; but I would—I said it was nonsense."

"I should think so ; of course you'd send. But why did you leave Marseilles in such a hurry ?" Charlie said, cordially.

And then Mrs. Selwyn James flushed up a little, and said she "didn't know, unless it was because it was so hot."

"It was very shameful of Madge not to come there, wasn't it, Charlie ? I've been as dull as ditch-water all the time. I was determined I wouldn't wait for her any longer, but that I'd just come on here, and enjoy myself. Your cousin is coming, isn't he ?"

Charlie nodded assent.

"And then you'll soon be Lady Cleeve, I suppose?"

"Well, I don't know about that—it's always hard to say whether you will or you won't till a man asks you, isn't it?"

"Oh! but he's sure to ask you; now, you know that he is. I used to think, when he was in love with me, that it was Madge was my rival; now I know that it was you."

"I was never anybody's rival, Alice," she said decidedly.

But Alice had already ceased to be interested in the subject; some one had looked admiration for her pretty peachy face from the courtyard of the hotel, and she was engaged in devising causes for perpetually passing and repassing the window without attracting Charlie's attention.

"Delicious this air is—quite warm, though it's January. I think I'll open the window a little, for my head has ached ever since I came to that pestilential place Marseilles."

"Pestilential!" Charlie repeated.

"Yes, for it is that. Don't let Selwyn know I didn't tell you in my note, for he's so fussy about such things. But there's some kind of fever there—nothing very bad, I dare say, for I didn't take it, and I'm extremely delicate."

So gossiping in this way, they passed a very pleasant time together, these re-united friends. It was such a pleasure to her to see any one who had known The Chase, that Charlie not alone endured but delighted in Alice's silliness. And so we must leave them for awhile, not to see them again till we pause with Victor on the threshold of Drummond Cleeve's door.

And then he entered the house where she whose deep sleep of maidenhood Tregoe had been powerless to dispel, awaited him, the charmed Prince, whose eyes were joyful enough now as he stepped across the threshold, from whence, when he went for good, his wife—his golden-haired cousin Charlie—would go with him.

He stepped across the threshold, thinking how surely she would find him altered by these months that had passed over his head since they had parted, and wondering whether the alteration would strike her, as it did him, as an improvement. He was very near to his heart's joy now—very near to the brightest hope he had ever had in life. And he liked to view it in every light before he approached and clasped it to his heart.

The young widower had pictured this meeting to himself many times, and arranged it in a variety of ways during his journey. He had recalled that vision of how he had seen her first, standing back, framed in the doorway at The Chase. He remembered how she had thrown her head back when he wanted to kiss her. He remembered his half-annoyance, half-relief, at this refusal, and how all annoyance had gradually faded away and died out before her constant partisanship with him—her unselfish desire to see his happiness assured at any cost. He remembered how she had spared him slight and annoyance, when others seemed bent upon heaping these things upon him on every side. And as he remembered these things he thanked God for having removed every obstacle between himself and the only one who could render life bright to him.

We are seeing nearly the last of my hero now, and I like to look at him as he stands on the threshold of the happier life upon which he doubts not he is about to enter. He was still a very young man when the punishment of what had been, after all, a very venial folly, was taken away from him. His happiness was coming to him at as early an age as most men meet with it in this world.

The goblets filled with sorrowful waters that had been held to his lips were not few in number; but

“One goblet at parting, though many
Have circled the board since we met,
The fullest, the saddest of any
Remains to be quaff'd by us yet.”

He stood for a moment on the threshold of the happier life on which he doubted not that he was about to enter; and then he crossed it, and a shadow that was in the eyes of the Italian who opened the door, fell upon his heart.

And before he had time to question—before he had time to realize that there was something wrong which called for questioning or remark—a girl who had lived at the Gate-house with Drummond Cleeve's family—a Baysford girl, to whom every one of the name of Cleeve was very awful and very dear, came forward hurriedly, and for greeting gave him this—

"Oh, sir! step gently. Oh, sir!"——and then she caught her apron to her eyes, and began to cry.

"Tell me what it is, and tell me quickly," he said. A sad foreboding seized his heart that the delicate baby, Charlie's little brother, might have faded away under the influence of this climate, to which the exigencies of fate had sent him.

"Tell me what it is, and tell me quickly," he said; and the girl sobbed out,

"Miss Charlie, sir!"

"Well, well," he impatiently interrupted, "tell her I'm come. Where is she?"

The girl had meant to break it to him gently and kindly, but when was bad news so broken? It always comes out with a burst that nearly surprises the one to whom it is broken out of his mind. We never come to bad tidings by degrees.

"She's ill of a fever, sir, and they say she'll never get over it," the girl cried out. And then she went up to him—that uncouth country girl with the rough hands and the uncultured speech, went up to him, who was a greater man in her eyes than the Prince of Wales—and put her hand on his arm, and led him, without another word, for he was blind and speechless with his grief, to the door of the room in which poor Charlie Cleeve lay dying.

"Step gently!" for what reason, when she whose ears

they would have spared all jarring sound was only battling with her bridegroom, death, till he who would have been her earthly bridegroom should come? What need for stepping gently, when his footfall was the dearest sound on earth to her, and her ears were almost dead to it? When her eyes were almost glazed beyond the power of brightening even at his approach?

She had been unselfish all her life, and character does not alter materially on a death-bed. She was dying when he came to her, though she lived for a day or two after his arrival, and she welcomed him and kissed him with the loving warmth of a sister, but with none of the hot passion that might sear his heart with lasting sorrow. In her soul she knew that his memories of her would be grievously tender, but by no act or word would add to that tender grief. And so in order that he might not mourn for her "so much," Charlie refrained from giving one sign of the deep love she had for Victor Cleeve.

So, like the woman whom fate had forced upon him, Sir Victor's choice—the youngest daughter of his race—died, and was buried in a foreign land; and despite her loving endeavours that it should not be so, his regret for her is as poignant as was Alice James's transient remorse, when the fever that had frightened her away from Marseilles proved fatal to Charlie Cleeve.

She had gone down to the hotel where pretty Alice James reposed upon a couch with a flushed face and a headache, and an unendurable sense of wrong almost in her bosom, that her husband should have suggested that as she came from a fever-stricken place, she ought in common honour not to have sent for Charlie without a fair warning; and Alice, to save herself reproaches, said she had given it, and, as was no uncommon thing with her, said that which was not true.

However, she had a fair, peachy, innocent face, and her husband believed that she had told Charlie that the infection might be there, and had thus given Miss Cleeve the option of coming or staying away, according to her incli-

nation. She had a fair, innocent, peachy face, and he believed her, and took no further precautions, and so Charlie, the loveable, if imperfect heroine of these pages, came to her death. And Sir Victor's choice fell upon one who was pledged to the grave before he could make it known.

The story is over now. The Chase stood vacant for a long time. Those spoke truly who said that Sir Victor would not come back to it. He could not come back to till the field he had pictured to himself, alone, and he is not likely to take another wife.

That which had been reft from him had been very near and dear to his heart, and he will never attempt to replace it; but he will travel, and hunt, and toil, in search of those wild beasts of the forest, a near encounter with which compensates men for the loss of a good many social joys. Thus he will live on, not unhappily perhaps, in danger and excitement, and by aid of novelty.

But he will never forget Charlie, and while he remembers her he will never come back to the civilization that crushed him, and The Chase that would latterly have been Hades but for her.

Nor can Madge make up her mind to settle in Devonshire now. Victor offered them the Gate-house when she refused The Chase; but Madge remembers the hours they spent there together, when Charlie battled with any love and sorrow she might have felt so bravely that her sister could only suspect the existence of either.

But Drummond Cleeve is not so inconsolable. Men with young wives and infant sons who are heirs-presumptive to baronetcies cannot feel that darkness is over all the face of the earth at the death of a mere daughter—not but what he regretted Charlie very truly, according to his lights. He could not bear to hear her name mentioned for many months, and the place in which she died became hateful to him. So, at Victor's request, he gave up the Consulship, and came back to The Chase, where he lives happily enough. He begins to take pride in the pretty little boy who was felt to be such a bane by

him, for his son's prospects are, he knows, strangely altered by his daughter's death; and all who know the circumstances feel sure that the little boy's heirship is a certain thing, and none feel it more strongly than does Sir Victor Cleeve.

THE END.

KEATING'S COUGH LOZENGES.

TRADE MARK.



A SAFE AND CERTAIN REMEDY for Coughs, Colds, Hoarseness, and other Affections of the Throat and Chest. In INCIPIENT CONSUMPTION, ASTHMA, and WINTER COUGH they are unfailing. Being free from every hurtful ingredient, they may be taken by the most delicate female or the youngest child; while the PUBLIC SPEAKER and PROFESSIONAL SINGER will find them invaluable in allaying the hoarseness and irritation incidental to vocal exertion, and also a powerful auxiliary in the production of MELODIOUS ENUNCIATION.

Testimonial.

SHERBORNE, DORSET.

DEAR SIR,—I should be very deficient in a duty which I owe to you, as well as to society in general, were I to omit giving full testimony of the great efficacy of your "COUGH LOZENGES," which I have experienced in their use; and shall feel much pleasure at all times to testify this, both as regards my own case, and to recommend them to any person under a similar complaint—that of pulmonary affection.

I remain, dear Sir, yours faithfully,

C. WEST.

To MR. THOMAS KEATING, Chemist,

79, St. Paul's Churchyard, London.

Prepared and Sold in Boxes, 1s. 1½d., and Tins, 2s. 9d., 4s. 6d., and 10s. 6d. each, by THOMAS KEATING, Chemist &c., 79, St. Paul's Churchyard, London. Retail by all Druggists and Patent Medicine Vendors in the World.

KEATING'S PERSIAN INSECT-DESTROYING POWDER.

This Powder is **QUITE HARMLESS TO ANIMALS**, but unrivalled in destroying Fleas, Bugs, Emmets, Flies, Cockroaches, Beetles, Gnats, Mosquitoes, Moths in Furs, and every other species of Insect in all stages of Metamorphosis.

A small quantity of it placed in the crevices of a bedstead will destroy Bugs, and as long as it remains they will not re-appear.

It is indispensable to Travellers by Rail or steamboat, and Visitors to the Seaside, for protecting Bedding and Cabins from FLEAS, BUGS, COCKROACHES, MOTHS, and MOSQUITOES.

Rubbed into the Skins of DOGS, CATS, or other DOMESTIC ANIMALS, it completely annihilates FLEAS, TICKS, and ALL OTHER VERMIN. It is extremely useful for sprinkling about the Nests of POULTRY, in PIGEON HOUSES, GREENHOUSES, &c. It is perfectly harmless in its nature, and may be applied without any apprehension, as it has no qualities deleterious to animals.

BLACK BEETLES.—Dusted about the haunts of these loathsome Insects, it so stupefies them that they may be easily swept up and destroyed.

Placed in Drawers, Chests, or Wardrobes, it protects Furs, Woollen Clothes, &c., from Moth.

Sold in Packets, 1s., Tins, 2s. 6d. and 4s. 6d. each; or 1s. Packets, free by post, for 12 Postage Stamps, and 2s. 6d. on receipt of 36. Also in Bottles, 1s. 2d., and with Bellows, 1s. 6d., and 3s. each, by THOMAS KEATING, Chemist, 79, ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, LONDON, E.C.

